THE·QUEEN·OF·LOVE·

S·BARING·GOULD·

THE QUEEN OF LOVE

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A NOVEL

BY

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ETC., ETC.

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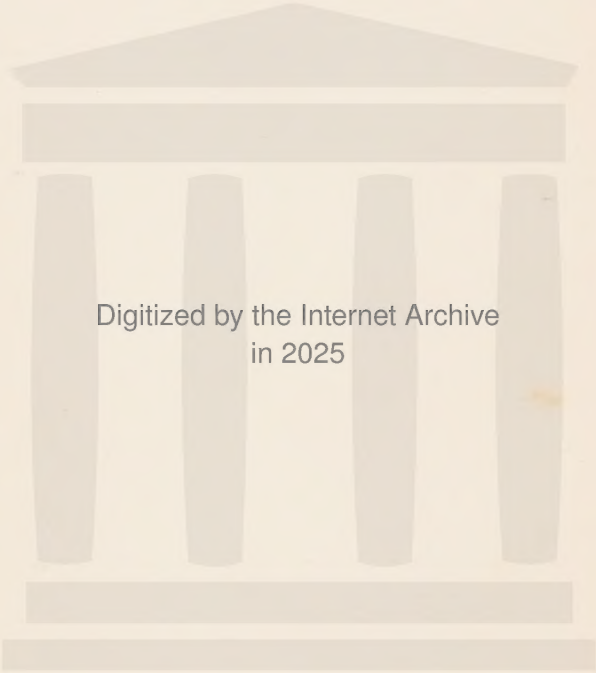
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CHAPTER I.

WILKES.

JABEZ GRICE had a brother-in-law of the name of Wilkes—a life-long friend, who shared his views on most subjects, though a very different man in manner and habits. It was, in fact, their early friendship that had led Grice to marry the sister of Ezekiel Wilkes.

Wilkes had never married. He was a lively, pleasant man, and was employed as a salaried agent to the political party to which he belonged, to look up the lists of voters, whip in such as had not registered and were sure to vote true, and to object to the claims of such as could not be calculated on, or who were known to be adverse in opinion. His function,

moreover, was to go round and stir up enthusiasm wherever it flagged; and, when an election was in prospect, to spread abroad such damaging reports relative to the honesty, the morality of the candidate for the opposed party, and to make such extravagant promises on behalf of the candidate of his party as would materially affect votes, but which could be disclaimed by the candidate if brought to book for false allegations or impossible promises. In all political canvassing Ezekiel Wilkes was absolutely unscrupulous, but he was, in every other relation, an honest, admirable and kind-hearted man.

As the member was in bad health, and it was rumoured that he would shortly resign, both political parties started into activity, and their agents were sent to prepare the ground for the candidature of the representatives of the orange-and-blue interest on one side, and the red interest on the other.

Hitherto, whenever he had come to Saltwich—an important political centre—Wilkes had been the guest of his brother-in-law. Directly Jabez heard that Ezekiel was coming to the place to spend there a few days looking up voters, seeing to the registration lists and spreading reports, he wrote to insist on his accepting, as usual, this hospitality. This, he assured him, he would be able to offer with a freer hand, as he was moving, in consequence

of his son's marriage, into a larger house, in which he would live on a better footing.

Wilkes had accepted the invitation before Grice had transferred his quarters from Alma Terrace to Button's, and now a note from him reached Jabez, naming the day on which he would arrive. Perhaps some hesitation arose in Grice's mind as to how Ada would receive the announcement. With unwonted lack of courage, he remitted to his son the duty of preparing her for the visit of Wilkes.

Accordingly, Andrew took his uncle's letter to Ada, who was in her room, and said,—

"He is coming. We have expected him for some time; and now he says he is longing to make your acquaintance, Ada."

"Who is it?" asked his wife, with indifference.

"My uncle—my mother's brother—Mr Wilkes. I am sure you will like him. He is a very agreeable person."

"I dare say. He is coming to Saltwich, is he?"

"Yes; and we must receive him here. He may be with us for a week. He has business connected with the coming election which will engage him."

"If he will be busy in Saltwich, why does he not put up at the 'Salters' Arms?'"

"Because he is my uncle. He was my father's dear friend before my father married."

"I don't see that we can take all your relations into this house."

"It is not all—one alone, and that for a few days; a week at the outside."

"It can't be done. Your father has the bedroom that my father was wont to occupy, and we are in what was formerly the spare room. As you see, it is engaged. I am not going to turn out for any Wilkes under the sun."

"My dear Ada," said Andrew reproachfully, "why are you always so full of objections and ungraciousness? I do not wish to turn you out of your room. Such an idea never crossed my mind. There is your old chamber, to the sunrise, that is unoccupied, and there is a bed in it."

"He cannot have that room—I keep my clothes there."

"Only in the wardrobe; we can have that moved in here."

"I have the drawers full of things also."

"We can have them cleared."

"I will not consent to have everything upset for the sake of someone I know nothing about, and do not wish to see, who comes here not to please me, but about his own business. The house is not an inn. This is the thin end of the wedge. You begin with this Wilkes, next will come Beulah, and then, as the climax, the mountebank girl. I will not suffer it."

"There is the other room—that looking west—it is unoccupied."

"It has no furniture in it to speak of."

"I will have your old bed moved, and other articles."

"My old bed and tables and drawers—thank you!"

"You cannot use every article, Ada! My uncle is coming and, as he comes, he must be put somewhere. He shall be accommodated."

"As you like," answered Ada, and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't want to make the acquaintance of and to be pestered with all your kith and kin. Heaven knows what they are! Some, I am aware, were circus folk. Does this man stand on his head? I presume he will not take his meals with us in his shirt sleeves."

"I leave you to arrange about the room. But mind me, Ada, he is to be accommodated here. If you choose to make a display of bad temper before him, then he will think ill of you, for which I shall be very sorry. I would wish him to say,—'Andrew, you are a lucky dog! you have got a lovely and an amiable wife. I wish you joy.'"

A few days after this conversation had taken place, Wilkes arrived—a little, round man, with a quick eye, grey, bushy hair and whiskers, and an abrupt manner. He was welcomed by Andrew and

his father. They shook hands warmly. The old fellow continued to hold and shake the hands of his nephew.

"Well done, my pippin! You have feathered your nest well. This is a change from Alma Terrace. Ah! you young rogue, with your blue eyes and fresh health, you conquer girls' hearts and they throw themselves into your arms with all their fortunes, and think you cheap at the price. Where is she? I must see her. I suppose I may snatch a kiss! It is the privilege of an uncle and of an old man."

"Come to your room," said Grice.

"Which way?"

The lively old fellow went out at the door, and trotted up the stairs. On the landing, Ada passed him, cold, haughty, and without looking in his direction.

"Stay, uncle!" shouted Andrew from the hall floor. "There is my wife."

"What!" exclaimed the stout, little man, turning round and catching her by the shoulder. "What! passing me like a stranger! without a word, without touching hands! Come, come! I knew your Andrew when he was a child; I knew him as a boy—I have never known him anything but the best of good fellows—a Nathaniel, in whom is no guile. You are happy in your choice."

Ada removed her shoulder from his grasp, gave a slight inclination of her head, and accepting his hand with manifest reluctance, said coldly,—

"I am glad to hear this."

Wilkes said some words of courtesy — but his intent to offer a kiss was damped in the bud. He felt restraint, and—wonderful for him—shyness, before the icy, repellent young woman.

Grice conducted him to his apartment; when the door was shut,—

"Jabez, old bird, is she always like that? Say it is a stiff neck!"

Then Grice's face darkened.

"Ezekiel," said he, "I suppose every man makes a mistake some time or other in his life. I have made one in getting Andrew to take her. For him it matters little—he is young and yielding. So long as she has good looks and money, he doesn't care; but for me it is different. She is intolerable. You shall judge for yourself. I couldn't help it. We must have had Button's ground, and there was no other way of securing it. Tom is a slippery party."

At meal time the presence of Ada made a sensible change in the condition of affairs to what they had been in Alma Terrace, when Wilkes was guest to his brother-in-law. It was like the presence of an iceberg. It chilled cordiality, it checked conversation, it impeded confidence; it even deprived the food

of relish and took the aroma off the tea. The rooms were larger and better furnished than at Alma Terrace, the victuals were better, and better cooked; there was apparently more of comfort in every form, and yet, in actuality, there was less. The moment Ada left the room every heart expanded to its old geniality; when she returned all were equally oppressed and contracted.

After supper, Andrew said to Mr Wilkes,—

"Uncle, do you mind a stroll along the road with me, I have something to say to you?"

"Your servant at any time," said Wilkes jumping up. "Glad to get out of the room for a little, and warm my blood with a walk."

When they were beyond the gate, Wilkes put his arm within that of his nephew and said,—

"Come, boy, I desire to say a word of congratulation. You have a wife who, I must admit, is one in a thousand. Never saw her like—never. You need not fear for her fidelity—she'll keep every one at arm's length. I'd have kissed the red-hot poker before I ventured on her lips. She's calculated to be a marchioness—by the piper!—a duchess. She has aristocratic pride in every fibre of her body—if it's not aristocratic pride, then it's pride that comes from something else. Nothing plebeian about her, my boy; none of your vulgar *bonhommie;* she is none of your Bouncing Sallies or Jumping Joans. Every

man has his own ideal of what woman should be. I didn't think you looked so high, Andrew."

The young man hardly knew how to take his uncle's words, whether spoken in commendation or the reverse. He accepted the dubious praise in silence.

"I'll light a pipe," said Wilkes. "Your father gave me a hint she didn't like tobacco fumes. Well —never offend the ladies. Now, what is it, boy? Nothing about domestic broil, I hope—for you know the song:—

> When man and wife are flouting,
> If a stranger pop his snout in,
> He is sure to get it tweaked for his pains!"

"The matter I desire to consult you about, Uncle Ezekiel, is that of Queenie. You have heard about her?"

"Yes. Grice wrote to me, told me that poor Sant was dead and that he had left the child in his charge. Where is she? I want to see the little dear, see if she has inherited any of poor Joe Sant's good looks."

"I do not know where she is. She left this place rather hurriedly, and is hiding somewhere. You see, she and father did not get on happily together. She is frisky, like a little grasshopper, and my father does not understand that sort of thing."

"But he knows whereabouts she is?"

"No; he does not."

"He must ascertain. If he does not, I will. She is no relation of mine, but I knew something of her father in old times when he was a boy. It was bad enough to have her running from one end of the island to another with dancing bears, tumblers and horse jockeys—but her father was with her. Now she has no one to guard her. Your father must pursue and recover her."

"You see, uncle, he is very busy just now."

"Busy or not—it is a duty. Bless my soul—what matter a pump and a brine-pan when an innocent child is in jeopardy."

"He does not see it in this light. I wish he did."

"There is no other light in which it can be seen," said Ezekiel Wilkes vehemently. "What is she doing? Is she starving? Begging her bread—bless me! among thieves and pickpockets. She must be found."

"She may be found; but then—when found—where is she to go?"

"Take her with you."

Andrew shook his head.

"That cannot be. She would not stay in our house. From it she ran away. She is as incompatible as a companion to Ada as she is to my father."

"I can believe it. I would take her myself, but I am a bachelor and a rolling-stone. She must be

found, that is the first thing. Next, as to her money —where is that?"

"Sunk in these works."

"But the interest of it?"

"Till her place of concealment is known, my father, even if he wills it, cannot help her. And he has peculiar notions on this head."

"Look here, Andrew, you go and find her. When she is found, then we will consult what is to be done for her. Leave your father to me. I will speak to him."

"But when am I to go?"

"To-morrow, Andrew; not a day is to be lost."

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT TO RAB.

On the morrow Andrew had disappeared. He had said nothing to his wife, nothing to his father. There were obvious reasons why he should not tell Ada that he was in quest of the orphan girl she had driven from the house. He left his father to learn what had taken him away from Mr Wilkes, who had undertaken the communication. He was not home at supper. He did not return all night.

With some malice, Mr Wilkes asked Ada if she knew where he was. She replied curtly in the negative.

"Something may have happened to him," said Wilkes, curious to see whether alarm for her husband would cause Ada to throw aside her frozen demeanour.

"Something—he has lost his head," said she. "I am not going to concern mine about him."

Andrew had gone first of all to Mrs Rainbow, and had in vain endeavoured to extract information from her. He knew nothing about her having a married daughter. Had he been aware of that, he would have gone to find the daughter. Mrs Rainbow declared that she had seen and heard nothing of Queenie since she came unexpectedly into the house with the basket of blackberries. When Andrew pressed her to be more communicative, she became stubborn and sulky.

The reason of her reticence was that she knew of Rab's attachment, she saw the transformation it had wrought in him, and she surmised that, unless he met with success, he would fall back into disorderly ways. Queenie was with the Gerards in the place where Rab's suit could best prosper, for it would be warmly seconded by Martha. Were the place of Queenie's retreat to become known, then Grice, her guardian, would certainly remove her, and she would be placed among surroundings and under influences adverse to Rab.

Loving her son, jealous for his happiness, the mother obstinately refused that information which, if given, might jeopardise his happiness.

Andrew told the woman that his father had money in trust for the girl, and ventured further to assert that some money was due to her.

"Very well," said Mrs Rainbow, "let that be left

with me—if Queenie is anywhere near, and comes to Saltwich, she will assuredly come to see me, and then I'll give it her. Here's an old sardine tin, there's a mouldy fish in it and some oil—I'll pour out the oil and eat the fish, then you can put the money in and I'll hide it in my mattress till Queenie turns up."

This Andrew naturally declined to do. In the first place, as he informed Mrs Rainbow, because he had not received the sum due to her; in the second, because that sum must be paid into the ward's own hand. His third reason—that he had no confidence in Mrs Rainbow—he did not state.

Disappointed in this quarter, he resolved to visit Rab. He asked the old woman how he was to find him, and she gave him but vague directions. It took up a good deal of Andrew's time to ascertain where Rab was, and what was his employment. It was queer to him that the thief had been set to watch thieves, the poacher turned into a gamekeeper.

When he had learned this, and also where Rab Rainbow's cottage was in Delamere, he departed for it, and on reaching it found the house locked up. Rab was away on his duties. Andrew was pleased to see how tidily he kept his little habitation, with a garden before the door. Nothing was now flowering in the latter, as the season was so far advanced;

winter was stealing over the country and blasting the vegetation.

The days were short and the light began to fail whilst Andrew hung around the cottage.

One thing was certain—Queenie was not there. He looked in through the window. There was no fire on the hearth; the whole aspect of the cottage was that of a bachelor's habitation.

Whilst waiting, Rab came up with his gun over his shoulder.

The two men looked at each other in silence, each hesitating what address to make to the other.

Presently Rab, unslinging his gun, rested his crossed hands on the barrel, and said,—

"Late to be here, Andrew Grice."

"I came to find you. I have been waiting for you several hours. You do not suppose that I would have left my business and wasted a day without good reason. I have matter of importance I wish to speak of with you."

"Well! come in," said the keeper.

He unlocked his door, threw it open and entered the cottage. Andrew followed him. Rab put his gun in a corner—he would clean it presently, it was foul—and seated himself on a bench. He pointed to a chair, the only one in the room.

"I have not much furniture; a lone man does not require much, and I rarely have visitors."

"I am rejoiced to see you in a house of your own, and engaged in honest work," said Andrew.

"You did not leave your business and come this distance, nor wait for me some hours, to tell me this. To your point, Andrew."

"It is this, Rab; I am here concerning the Queen of Love—do you know where she is?"

The ex-poacher looked hard at his questioner, and answered,—

"That is no concern of yours."

"You are mistaken. It is; that is to say, it is a concern of my father, who is her guardian."

"Why is not he come in search of her, instead of you?"

"For an excellent reason—that he is engrossed in this new concern Button and Nottershaw are starting."

"If he cared for the Queen, and knew his duties, he would have come."

"Surely, Rab, a father can trust his son!"

"He has left his duty for a long time unattended to."

"We knew nothing about the disappearance of Queenie at first. I will not say that we were purposely kept in the dark, but it so happened that we knew nothing at all about her not being at Button's till full three weeks after she had left the place."

"Left!" laughed Rab bitterly. "That is a strange way of putting it. Left! Do you call that leaving when you are thrust out, the door locked on you, and you are denied admittance?"

"Never mind about the circumstances of her departure. Neither you nor I can help them. They are of the past. What concerns me is the present. Come, Rab, tell me where she is."

"How should I know? Why do you ask me?"

"I will be open with you. Your mother certainly is aware where Queenie is, or, at least, has had some knowledge. I have ascertained that Queenie was speaking with you on that night when she was turned—I mean when she left."

"That night!" exclaimed Rab. "Yes, and she was speaking with you as well. I saw you with her. I overheard what was said."

"There was nothing said which you might not hear. Come, Rab, be frank. I know very well that you have had little Queenie in your heart. Is it so still?"

"That, I say again, is no concern of yours. You have your wife."

"I have, and for that reason I can speak openly to you. Queenie is to me a sort of cousin. She is a responsibility. My father has charge of her money. He undertook to care that she should come by no

harm. Let us know where she is, that we may find her some home or place of shelter."

"Has she got none? No shelter for her little golden head in this winter storm? No home—no prospect of any?"

He looked about his own modest cottage.

"What do we know? Nothing. These winter storms. Exactly! We are troubled at the thought that she may be out without cover in them, and exposed to worse than winter storms, with no one to look after her, no one to be solicitous for her."

"Andrew," said the ex-poacher in a low tone, but full of feeling, "do not fear that. She has one who will never, never suffer harm to come to her."

"Rab! Are you going to marry her?"

The young keeper looked at Andrew steadily, with an earnest, sad light in his eyes.

"I don't know."

"Rab, I must come to the bottom of this matter. Where is the Queen of Love? Where are you concealing her? You do know where she is, or you would not talk of watching over her."

He spoke with vehemence—a storm was working in his breast; his heart beat so that its throbbing was echoed in his temples. Was he jealous of Rab? Was this hidden commotion in him due merely to solicitude for a strayed cousin? This impatience to find

her, occasioned by concern that his father should fulfil the duties of his trust?

The searching eye of Rab was on him.

"Andrew," said the young ranger, "don't be a scoundrel. Don't get into the way of some of your set and begin by deceivin' your own self before you come for'ard to impose on others. You had the choice before you. There were the two girls—Ada Button and Queen of Love. It was not a choice between one rich and one a beggar, for if Miss Button had land, if what I hear be true, Queenie had money. You had your choice. The field was open; I did not stand in your way. You chose Ada Button and turned away from Queenie. By your choice you must abide. What you chose you cannot get away from, without bein' a rascal in your own eyes, and in those of all the serious—all of your profession in Saltwich."

Andrew listened, and lowered his eyes involuntarily.

"It is all very fine your pretending that you come here in fulfilment of a dooty. The dooty is the mask, Andrew, you put on to hide from yourself your real motives. You came here because you want to see little Queen of Love once more; because your heart aches, and you already repent the choice you made, because you say to yourself:—What a mistake I fell into—nay, what a mistake I went into with my eyes open! Lovin' one woman, I married another

whom I did not love, to please my father, with the prospect of becoming rich."

"No, Rab, not that."

"Well, let be. It was not that. Then it was because you did not value the little Queen. You saw that she did not belong to your set. She did not think quite as you thought. She did not grow prim, stiff, and dingy like an Irish yew, but bore light and widespread branches, like a silver forest birch. She did not care to peck and cluck on a dung-heap like a barn-door fowl, but darted and twittered as a swallow. Therefore you said she will not do for you. You had eyes and saw not—log of wood that you were—you saw not that hers was a braver, purer, more generous nature than your own. That was why you did not take her. She was beyond your narrow range. You saw not that she cared for you, and that she would ha' given to you happiness such as you will never get with that other. No—you saw not that. You were blind as an owl in daylight. Now it's too late. You must keep away from her, and she must be kept away from you. If your father desires assurance that she is in safe hands, I can give it him ; if he purposes sending her money, I bid you inform him that she needs none ; she has friends as will provide for her all that she requires. Now, no more. Are you goin' back to Saltwich? If so, keep to the road. Beware of the way down

Bramble Brook. Roaring Meg spouted there some while agone, and the earth fell in right across the road. If you were to follow that way, it would take you to your long home. You would see neither your wife, nor Queenie again for ever."

Then Andrew rose and left. But he did not return to Button's. He was not in the mood to do so. He took a bed at the "Forest Inn," on the outskirts of Delamere. He desired not to see his wife, his father, his uncle, till the morrow, when his mind would have recovered its composure.

CHAPTER III.

A TRIAL.

ANDREW slept but little that night. He had much to think about. As he had sat in the tavern eating his supper at a table in the corner, there had been men drinking nearer the fire, nearer the light than himself. He had declined to have a lamp on his table. He preferred not to be observed. The men were joking and speaking about their wives.

Said one,—"When my good woman begins to rattle her tongue, then I take up my hat and come here. I know that at this moment she is abusing the walls, the floor, the ceiling. All that abuse would have fallen on my head and shoulders had I not made off."

"Yes," said the other; "but when you go home, Jack, how then? Don't you get a double amount? Mine bottles her wrath up till I come home—and then—there's fine games!"

"If she begins at me—I shall return here. Drink's the only cure to the poison of a woman's tongue."

Andrew had listened to this conversation with sad heart, and he wondered that the fellows could laugh and have the stomach to drink, when their homes were so wretched. Could they quench their heart-burn thus? Could they drown remembrance of their troubles thus? Would the same medicine heal him? No—he must bear his burden without help from such means as sufficed these fellows.

Did ever any man have a wife so hard of heart as his own? And yet Ada was not harsh and repellent to everyone. She was not unkind to Jemima. She was amiable to Beulah. She was charitable to the poor. When some persons in need were sick, she sent them puddings, wine; she inquired repeatedly after them. She was even thoughtful of the comforts of people whom she was not bound to consider. But the fact that she owed care and graciousness of manner to her husband, to her father-in-law and to their friends, was apparently resented, and discharged her from making the effort to fulfil this duty. Kindness, graciousness she could show—but only as works of supererogation—she would not exercise them where they were obligatory. It had been so in her conduct towards her own father. Andrew was able to judge, by the manner in which Tom Button spoke of his daughter, that she had

taken no pains to please him, and now that this feature in her character was known to him, it explained the eagerness shown by Button to leave his house—an eagerness that had been previously enigmatical to Andrew.

To animals, Ada could be kind—she had her pet cat, her tame canary, her fan-tail pigeons. The cat loved to lie in her lap, and to be talked to and caressed. The canary would fly to her when the cage was opened, hop on her finger, and peck food from her lips; the pigeons responded to her call. Why was it that so much affection could be shown to dumb creatures, and that to her husband should be reserved stubborn defiance and acrimoniousness? Why was it that she drew and loved to draw animals to her, yet took a moody pleasure in repelling those of her own household and family.

Andrew retired early to bed. His room was above that in which the men drank, smoked and talked. He did not mind the smell of tobacco. He was accustomed to it. That of spirits disgusted him, and his bedroom reeked with the fumes. The men below became uproarious; they shouted, sang coarse songs, quarrelled, made friends, and then swore at each other. It was long after the hour when the taverner was bound to shut his ale-house that these half-tipsy men reeled away or were dismissed.

But even after they were gone, and Andrew had

heard the steps of his host and hostess retiring for the night, he could not sleep. His eyes were burning, his head aching, all his nerves were on the quiver.

There were thousands in the world who had been bankrupt in their domestic happiness, and they accepted their condition and made the best of it they could. Why should not he? He had sworn to take Ada for better, for worse, little dreaming then what the "worse" was. But he had received with her a good house, well furnished, an estate of many acres, and the prospect of a great fortune. There is something to counterbalance every advantage given by Providence. If perfect happiness were accorded in this world, men would fall in love with their existence in it, and be loath to leave it, unwilling to believe in and hope for a better life beyond. Every good thing has to be bought at the price of tears. If Providence passes over the counter so much wealth, so much land, such and such a habitation, it demands in payment so much heart's blood, so many anguish drops, so many sighs. Well!—he was now paying for what he had received. Tears in his burning eyes for the turnip field—ten acres; heartache for the shrubbery, gnashing of teeth for the house, humiliation for the vegetable garden, an aching heart for the garden gates—and so on. He was discharging his bill to Heaven for all the material

goods he had received. That man downstairs, who had drunk and laughed over his wrangling wife, had not he compensation for this? He enjoyed his coarse pleasures, was able to smack his lips over the landlord's villainous ale, puff with satisfaction his cheap tobacco, relish a brawl, and laugh over insipid jokes. He had been granted by Providence the faculty to reap pleasure out of what bred disgust in the finer mind of Andrew. How would it have been with him, questioned Andrew, turning from left to right in his bed, had he followed his heart and taken Queenie? Was it—as Rab had said—that the little girl had been willing to be his? He knew that it was so. She had given him her young heart, and he had refused the gift. He had been shown one who would have suited him, perhaps not in every particular, but in a thousand more particulars than the woman he had chosen. Queenie might have been moulded, but there was no possibility of making any change in the icy woman he had taken to his side. He might throw some of the blame on his father, who had proposed and urged on the match, but not the whole of it. No man can be driven into union with a woman against his own consent. His father had left him free to decide, and had done no more than fix the date at which the decision was to be made. He had made his election a day before the date appointed.

Again, solemnly in his heart, Andrew vowed that he would be true to his marriage oath, in thought as well as in deed; that he would not relax his efforts to win his wife by love and forbearance. He had done wrong in taking her when he did not really care for her. It was probable that she had discovered his lack of love and resented it. He would strive to make what amends he might to her, if she would suffer him—if—

Next morning, Andrew started for home. As he was walking towards Button's from Saltwich, he encountered his uncle.

"Well, old boy! Found her?"

"No; I am no further than I was."

"Let us sit down. Come inside this field gate; there is a roller and the hedge will keep off the wind. It is pleasant, in the last smiles of summer, to receive the benediction of the dying sun. It is that of Isaac:—My son, I give thee the fatness of this earth and the dew of heaven from above."

They went in at the gate. The ploughed earth was steaming in the hot sun. The hedge was hung with dew that gleamed as diamonds.

"Well, boy! I have spoken with your father. For the first time in our life, in my experience, we have disagreed, and almost quarrelled. Unhappily, he does not see it. He maintains his position. The girl has left the house where he put her; she has

fallen into bad ways; and, till he can be satisfied that she will spend the money properly, he will do nothing for her. It is monstrous—it is immoral, but your father is incapable, I believe, really incapable of seeing the matter in any other light. Then out came a reason—the worst of all. He has spent all her money. He has turned it to the last penny into bricks and mortar, into railway trucks for the salt, into boiling pans and slack to burn under them, into pumps and pipes, into chimney and stove house. He has spent all—every farthing, he avers—and therefore could do nothing, even if he willed. The capital is safe, he protests, and so I believe it is, but in the meantime where is the interest? What is the child doing? Who is looking after her? What profit is she getting from the sum her father bequeathed? I am angry and uneasy."

"I am sure that Queenie is not far distant; in a little while she must be found; but, so far, I am not certain where she is. Only in this am I confident, that she is in good hands, and we need not be anxious on that score."

"If you are satisfied, it is well. You are a judge. But do not intermit your efforts to find her. It is a duty owed her. If your father will not see after her unless she be a girl precisely to his mind, then you and I must do so for him. Now about yourself,

Andrew, I am sorry to say it, but I must. Old boy, you may as well open your heart to me. I have known you since you were a child, and I am your nearest kinsman, next your father. What I say, he feels, but he is ashamed to admit it. I have some scruple in speaking out, but it is better to speak plain than hide in the heart what works therein. Andrew, my pippin, that wife of yours don't please me. I'm sorry to say it, but she is heartless—hard and white as a bit of scale from your pans.

Andrew dropped his head and covered his face.

"I did not think matters were as bad as they are," continued Wilkes. "When I arrived, she chilled me by her reception. I have since observed you and your father. He is one man outside the house—the old man with his old weaknesses—no, with strength accentuated—more dictatorial, more impatient of opposition, more ready to browbeat, than he was of old; but within doors, he is limp and weak, he hardly speaks, hardly raises his eyes from the ground. And you, boy—I had hopes of you. A little infirm of purpose, a little overawed by your great and noble father—great and noble he is—a little too much given to trust him to judge for you, and to take all your opinions second-hand from him; nevertheless there was, I saw, sterling stuff in you, the promise of an upright and useful man. Now, I fear all the good will deteriorate, all the promise

come to none effect, through that woman. If she has quelled your father, she will quell you, and there is nothing in you to paralyse but what is good and vigorous. Therefore I say—she will be your moral desolator."

Wilkes paused and looked at Andrew, who remained with his eyes covered, speechless.

"At first," continued the old man, "I thought that there was hope. Hers was a self-enclosed nature, but if I could discover the key to her heart, I believed that I would discover that it contained much wealth. I know there are such natures, and happy are the husbands who have wives of this description. It is better that they should not wear their hearts on their sleeves for every daw to peck at. But the conviction has been forced on me that she is not such as I had hoped. Don't be angry with me when I tell you she is not the woman for you."

Andrew looked up, and tried to speak, but could not.

"There is no hope for you, boy, but in a separation."

"A separation?" gasped Andrew.

"Yes, you and she do not fit each other. She will be the death of all good in you, and you can do her no good. She is like a cold, damp mattress that will suck the vital heat out of you—and leave you a rheumatic wreck. Come to some arrangement between you, and part."

'It is impossible. I have made my bed, and so must I lie! Oh, uncle, uncle! I might have had another."

"Another!" exclaimed Wilkes. "Leave that thought out of the question altogether. Is it, think you, the knowledge of this that embitters her? If so, the blame adheres to you in a measure."

"Uncle, it is impossible for us to separate. The house, the land are hers—that is, her father's. Queenie's money is sunk in it. All our prospects depend on it. Father has thrown up his place at Brundrith's, calculating on this new business. Everything that concerns our future is in her hands. What would become of us if I were to say, I will not endure this life—I will go back to Alma Terrace; you shall bear my name and have no further part in me?"

"So, for the sake of a beggarly sum of money, for the sake of your prospect of becoming a rich man, you will continue to hug this lump of ice, to sip this cup of gall. I am angry with you. Don't talk to me of Queenie's money—that is secured by mortgage. No; if you remain at Button's it is because your eyes are dazzled with the prospect of becoming a millionaire like Brundrith. You have a pair of strong arms, fresh, healthy blood; cast such a thought from you and go back to Brundrith's, or go elsewhere and earn your seventeen shillings a week in peace

and comfort, without this devil of a woman to madden you!"

Then Andrew stood up, his weakness was past. He spoke firmly as he answered Wilkes.

"No, uncle, it is not that. I have no doubt I could earn my bread anywhere. I have no doubt that I should have tranquillity round about me. But I would carry away with me an undying torture within, disturbing my inner peace."

"How so, boy? I don't see it."

"Uncle—I swore before God to take her for better and for worse, and to hold to her till death. I swore that in the church when I held her hand. I swore it again last night on my bed. I cannot, I will not, seek a separation—but not because of money prospects."

"On my word! boy"—the old fellow also sprang up—"you are right. I was wrong. So far from killing out all that is good in you, this woman is bringing it to light. Here's my hand. God be with you. You have a future. God help you!"

He turned away, walked hastily through the gate, and took the road to Saltwich, whilst Andrew turned —home!

CHAPTER IV.

IN DEATH WE ARE IN LIFE.

THE weaving together of osiers into game-baskets, as well as into such as were ornamental, was an employment that brought in money; and Queenie was happy to have acquired the art from the crippled Jessie. In the season of the year, when the leaves are falling, and when Christmas is looked forward to, there is a demand for small hampers.

Saltwich, lying near the royal forest of Delamere, as well as numerous preserves of noblemen, was well supplied with game. The poulterers' shops were furnished by the poachers and by the gamekeepers, perhaps almost as much by the latter as by the former. Some of the landowners disposed of such game as they were unable themselves to consume, so that there existed the excuse for the serious wherewith to salve their consciences in buying at the poulterers, that it was possible, just possible, that the hares,

pheasants, partridges there exposed may not have been come by dishonestly.

At Christmas there would be a great sale for geese and turkeys, and in the game season, and the Christmas season, the good folk of Saltwich were wont to send hampers to their friends. Moreover, the owners of preserves asked for hampers by the hundred in which to disperse their game over the county among their friends.

To meet this demand the crippled child and Queenie were busy with their fingers. It proved that they had hardly osiers enough in the neighbourhood to keep them supplied. Accordingly, Gerard talked of making an osier bed, and asked his brother-in-law if he would cut a dyke to bring water into the pan where he would stick willow slips, because he himself, as ranger, was too much engaged with his duties. Rab's time was of less value.

Rab took for the occasion a day after a frost, one of those wondrous November days that intervene between storm and gloom, when the year enters on a second childhood, recalling early spring, with its crisp air, bright sun and its twitter of birds. And yet it is not spring. Nothing is budding, the leaves touched by frost are falling, the broad chestnut hands are all down, the male ash is bare as a skeleton; only the female still holds her fingers over the bundles of keys that contain her seed, and which she screens

from frost as long as possible. In the hedges stand up the scarlet heads of the wild arum, the hollies are red already; the improvident birds are desolating the mountain-ash in wanton thriftlessness, strewing the ground under the trees with the sweet berry. About a stone on the ground are strewn broken snail shells that a blackbird has been shattering, that he may take a surfeit of the glutinous morsels before they retire underground for the winter.

The sun is sufficiently hot to bring out faintly the aromatic breath of the pines, that was so strong in summer. Owing to the stillness of the air, the patter of falling acorns can be heard, also the tap-tap of a green woodpecker running up the trees and testing the bark for insects.

Lovely though the day may be, the loveliness is that of a dying year. The air is charged with the scent of death, of the fallen leaf, of the decay of vegetation. The frost has smitten the flowers, their late-formed seed-pods are rotting, not ripening. Green though some elm leaves may appear, the sap is out of their joints, and with the first gale they will be torn from the boughs.

And yet, in the midst of death we are in life. As the leaves sail down, they reveal the already formed bud, in which is the promise of leafage and flower for the ensuing year. Already, out of the ground are shooting some precocious seedlings, themselves doomed

to death, but harbingers of others following at a safer time.

Cheshire is a land of meres, the blue eyes of the county rivalling, not excelling, in blueness the tint of those of its girls, as limpid and bright, as inviting —and sometimes as treacherous.

The forest of Delamere occupies a tract of land not very fertile. The soil is of a hard, argilaceous crust, locally termed "fox-bench," lying in beds of from six inches to three or four feet, strewn over with a light, poor soil. In its eagerness to procure money, the Crown in former days has disforested portions of what was once a vast wilderness, and has given up tracts to cultivation, with but mediocre success. The forest-land is useful as forest, profitless under the plough. For the same reason, with the improvidence of a wastrel, in the days of George IV., it hewed down its magnificent oaks, the wood of which is hard as iron, and now Delamere Forest consists mainly of plantations of firs and pines of no age nor dignity of size.

Yet wild nature is never without charm; and if the upper growth be of no great grandeur, the undergrowth is full of riotous unrestraint, variety and caprice. The bramble flings its streamers at large, the heather mantles every open patch, the ivy runs up the trunks like a squirrel, and, like the squirrel, strives to reach and destroy the leading shoot of the tree. Moreover, there is wild life in the forest. Not

so much as there was when Delamere was a wood of oaks, for the bird little loves the pine; nevertheless, there can be no tract of country, in which man has his habitations thinly sprinkled, to which the wild creatures will not fly, just as the Pixies and Brownies, driven from the lowlands by the plough, have made the unenclosed and silent moor their last refuge.

Rab Rainbow was engaged on the trench he had been sent to cut. A piece of low, bad ground was separated from the mere by an undulation of the surface. It needed but a channel driven through this ridge to let the water run into the "pan" and make it sufficiently soppy to favour the growth of osiers. The fold was apparently of "rammel," first cousin to "fox-bench," and grew nothing but a little stunted broom. But the low-level soil, to which the water was to be introduced, consisted of clay. This was baked hard, and cracked in the summer under the hot sun, as also in early spring, under the March wind, precisely at those periods of the year when the willow ought to be making growth. Should this pan be flooded, the osiers would thrive where now nothing grew but coarse grass and moss.

"Confound this darned rammel," said Rab. "It's enough to turn the point of one's pick. What was it ever put here for—I suspect to prevent the farmer coming this way with his plough, that there might

be in the world some free land not hedged about. What is that? A quartz stone. How came that here? Such stones don't grow nowhere in Cheshire, no nearer than Wales, and it has been rolled over and over in water till the edges are worn off. I guess now this was all sea at one time; and, sure enough, it must ha' been, for the salt is below."

"You have a tough job there, Rab?"

The young man stood up. Queenie was on the bank watching him.

"It is slow work, is it not, Rab?"

"Raythe r; this rammel or fox-bench is so hard! But I'll break through."

"Shall I help you, Rab? I have nothing to do."

"You — Queen of Love! You are not strong enough!"

"I can use the shovel."

"Pshaw!" he continued, working with his pick.

Queenie turned up her sleeves, exposing delicately-moulded arms, and each elbow was like a rose.

"You will see," she said, "I can work. Set me where to begin."

"If you will—shovel out the soil behind me."

He had marked the line that was to be followed, with pieces of bough stuck into the ground, pieces on which still hung green leaves. The trench was three feet wide—Rab had cut to the depth of his knee; before him rose a hillock. There the trench would

be six feet deep from his own cut level, and before the water could be introduced he must go a spade-graft deeper still.

"Hulloo!" said the young man. "This is spade ground. We are at the end of the rammel. What is the meaning of this? Here is another white spar standing in the side. It seems as though they had been set on end.

"And this?" asked Queenie, as she stooped and picked up a small, reddish-brown stick with a knot at both ends. Then she dropped it. "It is a bone."

Rab continued to dig—the earth was now black, no longer red, and, as he struck, he disturbed pieces of pottery, very friable.

"I said it had been meddled with," said he. "Someone has been chucking old crocks here. The weather is warm."

He paused and looked behind him.

The pretty golden hair was glinting in the sun. Queenie had thrown back her straw hat and freed her head. The hat hung by the ribbons that had been fastened under her chin.

As she worked, thoughts chased each other and turned in her brain; when Rab ceased driving his pick, she ceased shovelling.

"I have had a letter," she said. "It was left at your mother's. It is from that good Seth. He is in Hull now, but has got no work that will keep him

through the winter. He has seen Genaud, the great circus owner, and he will take me on with the new season, so I need no longer be a burden to your sister."

"Queen of Love!" exclaimed Rab, and dropped his pick. "You are not going to leave us in spring!"

His face expressed his concern.

"Indeed—I am only of use in a circus. I have not been brought up to anything else."

"It ain't so. Martha cannot praise you too highly. You earn money with your hamper and basket weaving. You are of use to her in looking after Jessie, and—she will cry her eyes out if you go. As for me—for me—"

He took up the pick and recommenced work. He remained silent, with his back turned to her, and dug vehemently into the black earth.

Queenie watched him for a while, then resumed her shovelling, but did not throw out much earth. She expected Rab to speak, but he would not. Presently she said,—

"You are not angry with me?"

"You know I'm never that."

"Then why do you not speak?"

"I'm thinking."

Again he dug on and said no more. She waited, then threw out a little earth, and waited again. He

paid no further attention to her. She touched and plucked at his sleeve.

"Rab! You are angry with me!"

"I am not; if you will go—go, and there's an end o' my hopes!"

"What do you mean?"

"I shall have nothing to live for when you are away. I do not know how it will all end—I had light before my eyes—now all is dark."

"Oh, Rab, it is my profession!"

"May be—"

He dug his pick into the earth and out rolled from under his feet, along with the black soil, something globular. Queenie put her hands to it to throw it from the trench. It was too round, too big a lump for her shovel. Then she dropped it and uttered a cry of horror. It was a human skull. It lay in the black trench before her, staring up at her out of its hollow eyes, grinning with its white teeth.

Rab turned at her cry and saw the girl shrinking from the ghastly object.

"What the parson says is true," he remarked. "'In the midst of life we are in death.' I believe surely we have dug into a grave!"

"Oh, Rab, desist! Dig some other way."

"I cannot. We will put this into the earth again. But I must go on. We have disturbed the dead, but these can be no Christian bones—there is no church-

yard here. Look—what have I here?" He stooped and picked up a flint polished axe-head. "It's a thunderbolt," said he. "I've heard tell of them. This old, ancient fellow was killed with it whilst sitting under a tree, and they heaped the earth over him where he was struck."

Queenie was by no means eager for a return to circus life. She had tasted the peace, she had seen the beauty, enjoyed the comfort of a quiet cottage home. She delighted in the freedom of the forest and the beauty of nature. She loved Martha Gerard as she had loved no other woman. She was warmly attached to the crippled Jessie. Beside this sweet, pure life, so tranquil, so blessed, that of a caravan, with its restlessness, its noise, its unreality, had ceased to attract. If she must go back to the old life, it would be because she had failed to take root in the new existence. She had no claim on Mrs Gerard. The ranger's wife had not kept a servant, and could hardly be expected to entertain a lodger who paid nothing. Queenie had her clothes, but these would wear out; the soles of her boots already required mending. She needed sundry trifles, and every trifle cost money. She could not be a burden to her kind hostess, and the produce of her weaving would do little more than pay for her food and shelter. Probably the girl was in no way irksome to Martha, but Queenie was sensitive—had been

rendered so by the manner in which she had been treated at Mrs Rainbow's, at Alma Terrace, and the Buttons.

The sun was warm, the air still. From the sides of the trench a fresh scent of mould entered the nostrils. If this were a grave they were cutting through, it was one that had lost the savour and horror of death.

Rab turned round. The skull lay between him and Queenie. He had cut so far into the hillock that he was down in the trench to his shoulders. He put his foot to the skull.

"I wonder who he was," said Rab. "If he'd been a good man and respectable, he wouldn't ha' been buried here. He'd have been took to the church. Here he lies all alone, none near him. I shouldn't be surprised as he was such an one as me—a chap as had a lot o' bad in him, but one day he came to know a girl, with golden hair and dark eyes, and she laid hold of him and drew his heart after her, and he came to leave his bad companions and give up his wild and godless way of life, to see a bright, beautiful world of happiness open before him. But she didn't care for him; she didn't think he was good enough for her—which was true. And so she went off and left him in Delamere Forest under a tree, and he sat there, and God O'mighty in His mercy struck him dead wi' a

thunderbolt, to save him from doing something desperate."

He turned over the skull again with his foot.

"Rab," said Queenie, "how can you speak like this to me?"

"Because, little Queen of Love, your presence or absence is life or death to me. If you go"—he leaned on his pickaxe—"if you go, then I pray the Lord to strike me down with a thunderbolt."

"Rab," said the girl, "I will not go. I will remain here in dear Delamere. I love the forest. I love the life. I love you all."

"What—and me?"

She hesitated.

"I like—I respect you, Rab."

"Will you come to be mine? Then Delamere is the Garden of Eden again."

She put out her hand—over the skull.

Rab seized it.

"Queenie, in the midst of death we are in life. I thought it was all up wi' me when you said, 'I will go.' Now you will stay. Now you have put your hand in mine, it is all hope and joy and new life—sprung out of death."

CHAPTER V.

REBELLION.

When Andrew reached home, he went at once in quest of his wife, and found her in the little parlour engaged with her canary, to which she was supplying fresh water. He put his hand on her shoulder with a word of welcome, but she did not look in his direction, and answered his salutation with,—

"Take your hand away. I don't want to be touched by *you*."

"I am sorry I could not return last night, Ada. One or two matters stood in the way."

"It is of no concern to me. You were welcome to remain away altogether. I would not have run after you—you may be sure of that; nor would I have cried my eyes out had you never returned."

"Ada—how cruel you are!"

"Of course, I am in fault. Never was a wife treated as I am—neglected by her husband, brow-

beaten by his father, and insulted by every Jack and Tom they choose to invite into the house."

"We have invited none save my uncle, and he would never insult you."

"He gives me black looks—in themselves as great an insult as a word or a blow."

"Ada, he came here prepared to be friends and to love you as a dear niece. It is yourself who has chilled and alienated him."

"Again, of course, I am in the wrong."

"Never mind about these little frets and sores, Ada. Be loving and bright. I am so glad to see you again."

"There you have the advantage of me. As I said, it would have been a matter of indifference to me if you had never returned."

"Ada, for shame!"

"What am I in this place but a means to an end? You wanted my land for a factory, you wanted my home as a count-house, you want my garden for a reservoir, and to cut down my trees and stub up my shrubs to light your fires with, and, finally, you want my spare room for your vulgar uncles. I hate this sort of thing. I won't have it. I am made worse than a servant. A servant can give notice and leave. I am fast here, to see all my plants poisoned, my birds made sickly; my canary is unwell to-day."

"She is moulting. We are not responsible for that."

"And then you go off without a word, without a good-bye, and do not say whither you are going, whom to see — though I know well enough — and you return just when suits you, not to me, but to your brine-pans. I don't flatter myself I am the attraction. I know better than that. The attraction that draws you back from Delamere Forest, or wherever you have been, is the new salt factory. That interests you, that engages your thought. You have some feeling for bricks and pumps, but none for your wife whom you swore to cherish."

"Ada! you know this is untrue."

"No sooner are we married than you tell me I am a liar; my wishes you take a pleasure in disregarding, and now you desert me to run after yellow-haired circus girls."

"Ada!"

Then in came Mr Grice.

"Father," said Andrew, "I am glad you are come in at this moment, for there is a matter that must be settled between you and me and Ada once for all. It concerns little Queenie. My uncle and I have had a talk about her, and he and I are of one mind. By his advice I went yesterday in search of her, but unsuccessfully. She is somewhere within reach, but where, exactly, I do not know. I saw Rab Rainbow,

but no one else. He is acquainted with her place of concealment."

"Why does she remain concealed?" asked Jabez.

"She does not desire to return to this house."

"I would not let her come inside the doors," said Ada.

"Very possibly she knows that," pursued Andrew; "and she has no wish to go to Alma Terrace."

"There is no room for her there," said Jabez.

"That also, perhaps, she may know. I believe she prefers to find quarters for herself than take those provided for her by you, father. By some fatality, she has been placed in positions of constraint and contrariety unsuited to her light and elastic nature; she was unhappy at Alma Terrace, unhappy here. I do not suppose she found much comfort with Mrs Rainbow in Heathendom. What sort of a house she is in now, I do not know. Among what sort of people she is, I do not know."

"She is in a public-house. She is gone as barmaid," said Jabez. "That is the sort of situation into which the natural Eve in her will have thrust her."

"I do not believe she is in such a place," said Andrew. "Rab is reticent, but he assures me solemnly that she is in the best hands, and in a place where she is well protected from harm."

"Rab!" said "Hammer" Grice, roughly. "What is his word worth? What does a poacher, a drunkard, a debauched scoundrel like that know about respect-

ability? If he is the guarantee, you will find Queenie in the worst quarters."

"You mistake Rab."

"I—I mistake! I know what he is; not only by the inner light that illumines me, but also by public testimony. What is Rab but a drunken blackguard?"

"He was such. He is reformed."

"An Ethiopian does not lose his colour if he scrubs himself. His wickedness is in the grain. He is a 'backslider.' He knew better at one time; and now there is no place left for him, though he may seek it. Don't talk to me of Rab. He is a worthless vessel, pre-ordained to destruction."

"I differ from you," said Andrew, with decision.

His father stared. What spirit had come over this young man that he should dare, not merely to differ in opinion from "Hammer," but to proclaim it to his face! Had his marriage done this? Grice thought so. He turned pasty in colour with anger, and said,—

"Because your wife flouts me, you hide behind her petticoats, and make a feeble stroke at your father as well."

Andrew coloured.

"You are mistaken," he said, with an effort to maintain his composure. "I have to judge by what I see. I have had more opportunity of observing Rab than you have had. I trust his judgment."

"His—not mine!" bellowed "Hammer." "Trust that tavern sot, that pothouse brawler, that poaching thief, rather than your own father, the most respected man in Saltwich!"

"I trust my own judgment, formed on observation, rather than your prejudice, father. But enough of that. It is not concerning Rab that I am seeking an interview. It is concerning Queenie. You are trustee of her property and her guardian."

"And you are neither, and therefore not called on to interfere."

"I must interfere. I conceive that a great wrong is being done her. In the first place—as her guardian, you are not taking any steps to obtain for her a place of security and comfort. I believe she has found both for herself. I believe it on the testimony of Rab Rainbow. If you disbelieve his word, and think him incapable of judging, then the more the obligation lies on you to see after her, take her from where she is if the place prove unsuitable, and put her where she may be better looked after."

"Andrew—the father in the parable did not run after his prodigal son into his riot and beggary, and pluck him away. He waited till he returned a penitent."

"The cases are not parallel. This is not a son but a little girl, and you have voluntarily taken on you the responsibility for her well-being. But next,

and this is now the serious question—What about her money? You have made use of her capital. You have taken it out of the bonds and other securities where her father had placed it, and where it brought in, say three and a-half or four per cent., and have expended it in bricks and mortar and machinery. Where is the interest? What do you show for this capital of hers? Let her have three and a-half if you cannot just now pay four per cent., but, for Heaven's sake! do not defraud her of everything."

"Defraud!" said "Hammer"; "you dare say that to me?"

"I am sorry to offend you, father, but I know no other word to express what is being done, when a child is left, possibly to starve, without one penny, when she should be in receipt of just over a hundred a year—enough to keep her in comfort—whilst you are making use of her capital to build up a fortune for yourself. You must remember what you said to me, father—that you looked to our being rich as Brundrith, to buying a park and mansion, to your entering Parliament. This is all to be gained through poor little Queenie's capital, whilst she is ignored, cast out, and nothing is done either to see that she is among respectable people, or that she is not suffering from want."

"When the prodigal returned, then the father slew

the fatted calf and brought forth the gold ring and raiment for his son. He did not send him the joints of veal to consume with harlots; he did not forward to him ring and raiment wherewith to make a display at his riotous feasts. I shall not defraud the child of one farthing, but I will pay over to her the money I have in trust, as well as arrears of interest at five per cent., not three and a-half, when she is brought to her senses, acknowledges her sins, and comes to me in repentance. I hope she is starving and in rags, eating the husks that the swine are given. So only can she be humbled in mind, and so alone come to realise her present lost condition."

"I have spoken my mind before Ada," said Andrew, "because she is annoyed at my going in search of the poor child, and puts a wrong interpretation on my acts. I wish her to understand how matters stand relative to her and you, father, and how I am concerned in the matter. I do not think your actions right; and if you will not see to Queenie, I must, or get Uncle Wilkes to do so. His time will be so taken up with electioneering matters, that he can ill afford space in which to search for Queenie, but he and I will provide for her, if you refuse, father, to do what he and I regard as your duty to her."

"I am to be taught my duty by a boy!" shouted Grice, and flung out of the room.

"And, let me tell you, none of my money is to be

spent on *her!* Where will you get money? Are you receiving wages from your father now? I laugh at your undertaking."

Then Ada, carrying the bird-cage, left the room as well.

Andrew walked to Saltwich. He desired to see his aunt and to have a word with Mr Button.

As he passed the shop of Mr Poles, his eye was arrested by a collection of pretty little rush baskets in the window, among his collection of paper. The pattern was identical with that of the basket of blackberries Queenie had given him.

He instantly entered the shop.

"Mr Poles," said he, "whence did you get this supply?"

"You may well ask why they are in my window," answered the paperhanger. "But there is a reason. I wish to oblige a very worthy woman—Mrs Gerard, the head ranger's wife in Delamere; she is sister to that queer chap, Rab Rainbow. You'd hardly think it—she is a good creature, and has a crippled daughter. The child makes these, and I don't see but what there's as good a chance of their selling in my window as in that of a fancy shop. So I'm taking charge of them and making no profit by them. Some folks rather fancy this sort of thing. Will you be pleased to buy for Mrs Andrew Grice?"

Andrew had discovered what he was desiring to

find. He remembered that Queenie had said she had learned plaiting of a crippled child. Undoubtedly, she was with the Gerards. He did not know the family, but Mr Poles's word of commendation was a guarantee for their respectability. With a lighter heart he took his way to Alma Terrace.

CHAPTER VI.

WALK!

THE salt factory was in working order—nay, it was even in work. Much money had been spent thereon —all Queenie's little capital and some of Nottershaw's savings; not altogether in the form of gold, but in that of material, bricks, lime, iron, wood, slate. The firm had supplied itself with covered trucks on the line, built at Chorley, and each truck cost £102, 10s. and held from six to seven tons of salt. Grice had introduced into the works an improvement of his own —a rotator—a species of flexible belt that travelled on a level, and carried along with it baskets in which the moulded salt from the tubs was tossed. These blocks were then dropped, or tilted over, as the belt turned, into the receiver of a mill of revolving steel rollers that ground the salt to dust. The idea had long worked in Jabez's mind, but he had not been able to carry it out at Brundrith's. Now, to his de-

light, it was in working order, and he looked with pride at the white blocks travelling along, and then dropping into the hopper which discharged them under the roller. It was an invention destined, as he said, to revolutionise the trade. Those who bought and employed the flour of salt for the table, would never afterwards return to the coarser crystals.

Already the chimney was pouring forth its volumes of smoke. Already the pans were in ebullition. Already the trucks were being laden with "butter salt" for the East Indies, and women were employed packing table salt for the home market in water-tight bags and jars. Already barges were drawn up at the wharf, and salt was being tipped into them.

Brundrith began to fidget. Brundrith became sensible that his interests, his all-but monopoly, was menaced. Brundrith began to move in the direction of Button. Brundrith began *pourparlers*, and *pourparlers* introduced negotiation.

Nottershaw was in high glee. He came to the works and button-holed Grice.

"I say"—he removed his finger from the button-hole to rub his hands, then hooked his finger in again—"I say, all is going splendidly. Brundrith is holding back only because he and Tom Button can't come to precise terms. It is a matter of a few hundreds only that divides them. Jabez, that invention of yours is famous. It tells. It has

troubled Brundrith's dreams. That means some hundreds more than the mere plant and ground. By ginger!—"

"Hush! don't swear."

"I'm not swearing. Ginger comes from Jamaica. It is imported in pots, which my daughter paints for bazaars when they have been cleaned out. Old fellow! never you take ginger with port wine—it is fatal. It spoils the palate."

"I never touch alcohol in any form."

"To be sure, I forgot. But bother the ginger. Let us back to our muttons. Grice, I wonder what the figure is at which old Tom is sticking?"

"Don't you know?"

"How should I. Tom Button has not told me."

"Nor me. It is odd. He has not consulted me as he should have done."

"Tom is a sly dog. I wish we had not made him our plenipotentiary. It all comes of your wanting to hold back and not be brought to close quarters with Brundrith. And I—you are to blame, Jabez. You thought I was an orange to be sucked and cast aside. I know what your scheme was, to use me and then pay me off, and exclude me from the ulterior benefits—not take me into partnership. By George!—"

"Hush! I cannot allow of oaths."

"I am using none; my great-uncle was George

Hamlet. He was an admirable man; whenever I am serious and think good thoughts, I recall George Hamlet. He had lumbago very bad, and was accustomed to sit with his back against a roaring fire, exposed to its full heat; it drew out the rheumatism, he said. He lived till he was seventy-four and five months. He was a very worthy man, was George. Two drops of turpentine on a lump of sugar—that was what he took internally, and exposure of his loins to a roaring coal-fire—externally."

"Never mind George Hamlet."

"But I do mind George Hamlet. I owe a great deal to him. He gave me a complete collection of Simeon's skeletons—I mean skeleton sermons—to do me good internally, and left me seven thousand pounds for my external advantage. But, as you say, to our muttons. I tell you, Grice, we have put too much power into Button's hands. You have sunk money on his land, and I have done the same. What hold have we on Button?"

"His daughter is married to my son."

"Yes; but I have no hold on him," said Nottershaw.

"For all I have advanced, I have the security of a mortgage on the estate."

"Yes; but I have not. Of course, there is the fabric, there are my books to show the expense to which I have been. But I am not altogether easy.

Button is sly as a badger. You are a serious man, and I rely on your character. It isn't worth your while to diddle me; so I build on you. But Button—" He shook his head. "He ought not to have been invested with such powers. There has been the mistake."

"You should have looked after him. I am engaged on the works."

"That is all very well, Jabez," said Nottershaw, "but I have not a defined position in the concern. You two fellows have desired to keep all in your own hands, so that, when a partnership is declared, it may be Brundrith, Grice & Button—and Nottershaw not even as a Co. I was to be paid for the bricks and slates and so on. A little profit—not much—and the grand harvest was to be yours and Button's. Well, I put in my claims. But I'll tell you what troubles me. Here have we been, all three, combined to overreach Brundrith, and, as far as might be, to overreach each other. That is to say, you and Button wanted to get the better of me. I hope Button won't be fishing for his own basket, and forget Jabez & Co."

"He cannot do that. My son has married his daughter."

"Much he cares for Ada," laughed Nottershaw. "You would toil, and lay by, and sacrifice yourself for sweet Ada, I have no doubt. By ginger!—

I mean preserved ginger — there is the man himself

"What! Button?"

"No—look! Brundrith in our works. That is what I call impudence. He will not pass over your rotator and crusher without realising its importance and taking note of the construction. Will you go and meet him?"

"I had rather not. We are not on the best of terms."

"Let us go behind this wall of salt blocks and observe him. It will be larks, by Jove!"

"No oaths, please!"

"Jove was a personage in the heathen Pantheon. Very consoling to a Christian to consider, the victory of his religion over Joves and all that sort of thing, so I mention him occasionally to stir up a thankful spirit in me. Come along, Grice. I'm going to watch him from behind this mountain of salt loaves."

"If you think that I am going to hide from Brundrith you are vastly mistaken. I wouldn't get off the pavement for the Queen, and I'm not going to stir from the floor for Brundrith. If he chooses to come my way he can do so. But it is impudence on his part, and I have half a mind to order him off the premises. He's walking about as if the place belonged to him."

"He is indeed, by jiggers!"

"Jiggers! I really wish, Nottershaw, in the interests of our serious profession, you would be more choice in your speech."

"Jiggers! There's no harm in jiggers. It is wrong not to enlarge the mind. You keep yours on brine, and never look beyond your pans. I do; my intellect sweeps the horizon, and I consider the gold fields where jiggers are used for the sifting and washing of the ore. Brundrith is coming towards us."

Peter Brundrith, the great salt man, was, in fact, in the new works, looking round them with critical eye. He was a broadly-built man, with a clumsy walk, white whiskers, a somewhat flat face, and dark, beady eyes. He went about with his hands in his pockets, and occasionally removed his right fist from where it lurked, and rubbed his lips and nose with it, clenched into a ball. It was a trick he had brought along with him from the lighter to the mansion, from the times of his early life when he used no pocket-handkerchief. It was now merely a trick.

Brundrith looked hard at the rotator and the mill, and nodded with a grunt. He turned his head to Grice who was near, and said,—

"So, you have carried it out. It's not bad. I shall make something out of it."

Jabez opened his eyes.

"You've not patented it, I suppose?"

"No."

"I shall. I have taken the lot."

"I don't understand you," said Grice.

"Hope you made good terms. You'll get nothing more from me. I paid damned dear."

"Look hear, sir!" said Grice. "As long as you were master and I man, I couldn't rebuke you for your profane speech. Now we stand on one level—I and you—and I can speak. If you had been godly in your conversation and had refrained from oaths, I would not have left your service as I did. But when a man gives loose rein to his tongue, then one who is serious in his profession deals without scruple with him. I left you in the lurch. I know you missed me. I have drawn away your best workmen. I have attracted to me some of your best clients. If you had been godly in speech and had attended chapel, and sent things to bazaars, that would not have happened. Now you and I are on one footing as masters, and I can tell you my mind plain."

"Now, I don't understand you, Jabez," said Brundrith. "And don't care to do so. You behaved scurvily with me; so I shall make no bones with you. Walk!"

Grice stared at his old employer.

Brundrith turned to Nottershaw.

"Mind this—no bills. I have accepted all as paid for. I take over the whole concern."

"What concern?" asked the contractor.

"This."

Brundrith turned his sharp eyes on Grice, and said,—

"As there's a woman in the concern, I won't be too harsh. But I expect you to clear out at your earliest convenience."

"Clear out—of what?"

"Of Button's, to be sure. I've taken over the whole concern. As for you—walk out!"

"Walk out of what?"

"Out of this shop. It's mine. Bought everything—land, house, factory, stock, stables, your invention—everything! Going to run Button's along with my old affair."

Grice and Nottershaw were speechless.

Brundrith trotted into the stove-house.

Grice and Nottershaw looked at each other. The former recovered himself, and went after Brundrith, touched his arm and said,—

"All very fine this, but we are partners."

"We—who?"

"I and Nottershaw."

"Partners out in the cold! Walk!"

Then in came Andrew, looking hot, and caught his father by the sleeve and drew him into the walling shed.

"Father, have you heard the rumour?"

"I've heard something that has set my head spinning."

"Button—father."

"What of him?"

"Bolted, and taken everything with him."

"Then we are done for," gasped Grice, and sank on a salt tub.

"Everything gone but the mortgage."

An imperious call from Brundrith,—

"Now, then, Grice—walk!"

CHAPTER VII.

RUIN.

JABEZ GRICE could hardly have been more dismayed had his favourite preacher danced a hornpipe in the pulpit of Little Bethel, or his pet Missionary Society had organised itself into a Co-operative Slave-hunting Company.

The news, borne in on him at both ears—from Brundrith on one side, from Andrew on the other—was but too true. Tom Button had outwitted all with whom he had been in conjunction. He had sold his land, his house, and the factory for a lump sum to Brundrith, and had departed with the money in his pocket, no one knew whither. Brundrith had therefore acquired everything—not only the factory—also Grice's invention for grinding salt into gold, also the house in which Jabez and Andrew with Ada were living. Whether Nottershaw would be able to recover for material employed in the fabric was open to question.

Button had assured Brundrith that every account was settled. Thus both Grice and Nottershaw had been overreached; but Brundrith did not escape scot free, for no intimation had been given him that there was a mortgage on the property.

It had been understood between Jabez Grice and Tom Button that one of the stipulations of the sale was to be that both of them were to be constituted partners in the newly-organised Company. Button had not concerned himself about this; he had sold everything for a lump sum, and, with that lump sum in his pocket, had gone chuckling into space, taking with him the satisfaction of having "done" his fellow conspirators against Brundrith's monopoly, of having done Brundrith in a matter of three thousand pounds by concealing the fact of the mortgage, and of having paid off Ada, his daughter, for many a slight. The sinking and completion of the brine shaft had cost about £800; each salt-pan had come to nearly £600. The grinding mill had cost £300. Over the "common" salt there had been no permanent covering set up, but the "butter" salt had exacted roofed sheds, so also the stove for "handed squares," and the stove room with a loft over it. The reservoir had cost much money. Not only was every penny of Queenie's capital disposed of, but also several thousands of pounds that Nottershaw had advanced either in material or in wage to workmen.

Now Grice was left out in the cold. He had lost his employment at Brundrith's, and would find none in the new factory under the man whom he had attempted to injure. He could not call the house he inhabited his own; even Ada must turn out of it That thought was the only one that gave him a gleam of satisfaction. But the gleam was a mere flash as from a spark of magnesium—instantaneous, and leaving behind a sense of more profound gloom.

In came Mr Poles. He was in excitement. He had been in Liverpool and had seen Tom Button by accident, and was confident that he had started for New York. He was sure it was Button, though the man was disguised in an outrageously fast costume, and with jewelry on his fingers, and in his scarf. He had a somewhat bold-looking, dressy lady on his arm. They were leaving an hotel and starting for the wharf —much luggage in very new portmanteaus and boxes on the roof. On one of the latter the initials U. C.

"Uriah Something-or-other," suggested Poles. "It is remarkable," said he, "that U and C are the letters that follow on T and B, the proper initials of Tom Button. I am not sure, but I fancy he saw me, for, directly I recognised him, he jumped into the cab and pulled up his greatcoat collar to hide his face. I was so taken aback that I did not at the moment know what to do. I asked the waiter at the hotel door whither the gentleman had gone, and he said that

the gentleman had informed him he was off with his missus to New York by the *Caledonia*—I think that was the name of the ship. That puzzled me. Tom Button lost his missus twelve years ago."

"I'll go at once to Liverpool," said Andrew. "We must make sure of this without delay."

Jabez Grice was as one stunned, unable to advise a course, unable to see any way out of the cloud. But his eyes kindled and he set his teeth.

"This comes of Ada," he murmured; "she turned away from her the heart of her own father."

Andrew was about to leave, when he heard these murmurings. He said in a low tone,—

"Father, I will go. But remember one thing. If you speak to my wife about this matter—not a word of offence, understand! I will have her respected. She is not to blame. The blow will fall heaviest on her."

"Respect such a woman as that!" scoffed the old man, losing all command of himself. "Such a woman, who has driven her father from her! Such a woman, who has insulted, outraged me!"

"I will not leave the place," said Andrew, "unless you pass to me your word, as a serious Christian, to address her with decorum."

"I won't speak to her at all. I shall go to Alma Terrace, to Beulah. Now that scoundrel is away, I can have his room."

"No, father. There must, under the circumstances, be some one in the place. Do you go to Liverpool; I will remain here."

"You go," said Jabez, sullenly; "I will not look at, I will not speak to Ada. I will persistently turn my back on her."

Andrew went to Liverpool, and the result of his inquiries was that no doubt was left in his mind that Mr Button had departed for the United States under an assumed name. Mr Nottershaw accompanied Andrew. He was in a fume, afraid that he had lost his money, uncertain whether he could come down on Brundrith. He ran from one solicitor to another to obtain opinions, which were conflicting, partly because he was unable, in his then condition of excitement, to state his case clearly.

Andrew learned more concerning his father-in-law than he expected. Button had been wont for some years to visit Liverpool, and had fallen into extravagant ways, had borrowed money, and must have been in embarrassed circumstances when Jabez Grice proposed to him the project of the salt factory.

When Andrew returned to Saltwich, he found that the news of the disappearance of Button was known to every one, and on reaching the house, further discovered that the bailiffs were in possession, with a bill for £37, 10s. 4d. They had been put in by a spirit merchant.

Jabez Grice was hardly able to command himself. The destruction of his hopes was more than he could endure with equanimity. He wandered about the house, the grounds, the factory, without a purpose. He paid no attention to his son's report. He had already convinced himself that he must accept the worst. He had no money of his own. Ada had none in the house. Even if he had been rolling in gold, he would have refused to satisfy the claim of the spirit merchant as immoral. His brother-in-law, the only man who could have soothed his mind, was away, and would not be back till night!

The old man sat and listened to his son, gazing into the fire, and as Andrew spoke, the canary sang in shrill and ever shriller tones, as though laughing and mocking at their misery.

Then Andrew ascended the stairs to his wife's room. He had been told that she was above; she had not shown herself since the appearance of the bailiffs in the house.

Before her door Andrew turned for a moment and drew breath. His heart ached for Ada. The blow to her must be crushing—to lose her father with such ignominy, to have to endure the disgrace of the odious men below, and to see the prospect before her of being constrained to leave the home in which she had been born. Worse still, she, who

had been reared in comfort, in self-indulgence, must be prepared to settle down to the level of a labouring man's wife, in a cottage, without a servant, would have to scrub the floor, do the washing, light the fires herself. She had not behaved kindly to him. Who could tell! might not this humiliation be the rude shock which would result in a softening of her heart, lead to an improvement in her manner, and thus that great good might come out of present evil?

He had not liked Tom Button; had not felt the least love spring up in his heart towards his father-in-law, but his daughter must surely have felt attachment towards the author of her being, though with her lips she had spoken irreverently of him.

Now, almost for the first time since their marriage, was Andrew conscious of entertaining love for his wife. Out of the pang of his great pity for her, love took birth. He resolved to exercise the utmost forbearance towards her; to veil, as far as possible, the greatness of her loss, and the scandal of her father's conduct.

Then he softly turned the handle of the door, and entered her room.

Ada sat by the window knitting, and, as he came in, was counting the stitches.

He took a chair, drew it opposite her, and waited till she had done counting. Then he laid his hand on hers and said,—

"Dear Ada, a word with you."

"Well!" she looked at him with a cold glitter in her eye; yet he could see, from the redness of the lids, that she had been crying. "I have come upstairs to be away from those fellows—I suppose I am not to be allowed the satisfaction of being left alone, even in my own room, but am to be pursued thither by you. I am sorry there are no attics to this house, or I would have fled to them."

"I hardly know, Ada, how much has been told you. I do not wish to distress you more than need be—"

"Then leave me to myself."

"Ada, I have seen Brundrith. He has no wish to behave ungenerously; on the contrary, we are welcome to remain here till Lady Day. Your father has sailed for New York, but I can hardly believe intends to leave us completely at the mercy of the creditors."

"Then you know very little of my father. He cares for no one but himself. Did not I warn you that he was making for America? I saw, from his manner, that he had some such scheme brewing. As I said it, of course you paid no attention. I am a liar and a fool in your eyes."

"You are neither—but an unfortunate, unhappy young wife."

"Thank you! I want none of your pity."

"You have it, all the same. And in a pitiful condition you are."

"How do you know my father is gone to America?"

"He left his hotel at Liverpool for the boat—he said he was off to New York."

"He said that?"

"Yes, Ada—at the hotel."

"Then—he is not started for New York yet."

"Ada, prepare your mind—your heart I would rather say—for what is before you. Our prospects of making a large fortune are at an end. But God has given me wits, strong arms and hearty resolve. I have made up my mind as to my course. As I tell you, I saw Brundrith. I went direct to him when I returned from Liverpool. I told him frankly how matters stood. I could see by his manner that, though angry with my father, he is placable. I will again go to him and ask him to overlook the past, and take my father on as foreman and me as waller in this new factory. I believe he will readily agree. We have perhaps behaved badly to him, but he is a worthy man and does not harbour resentment."

Ada laughed bitterly.

"This is what it has come to! That I—I am to be degraded into a common, vulgar workman's wife. This comes of marrying into a family of beggars."

"Ada!"

The blood mounted to Andrew's brow.

She started from her seat, and flung her head on the pillow of her bed and burst into tears.

Andrew went to her. He could not bear to hear her sob and weep. He laid his hand on her head. She passionately withdrew from the pressure, raised her head and said,—

"If I am unfortunate — unhappy — it is because I have you as my husband and cannot rid myself of you. I do not care if I never see you again. You married me for the sake of this house and ground, and the brine-run under it—not for my sake. For me you never cared. Now that what you wanted goes from you, you hate me."

"Ada!"

"Leave me in peace. The sight of you makes me mad."

"And the sight of you makes me despair."

He could have bit his tongue off that he had allowed this cruel word to escape him. But so it was with Andrew; the softer his heart had become, and the warmer his feeling, the greater the revulsion when wounded, and when his kindly feeling was repulsed. Whenever he was indifferent to his wife, or felt an inarticulate aversion, he remained calm, spoke with gentleness, could not be goaded to a harsh speech; but whenever a warm and powerful

gush flowed through his arteries, and a mild and sympathetic light kindled in his eyes, then disappointment made him lose command over his words.

He left the room, shut the door behind him, and said to himself,—

"My father was right. Once in man's life does Providence offer him a great blessing—if he puts that from him, then he is shut out for ever."

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE MERE.

QUEENIE was not happy. She had as much as engaged herself to Rab. When she put her hand into his, with a sudden impulse, he had accepted it as her concession to his wishes, and she had herself, at the moment, so intended it to be taken.

The desire to return to the stir and change of the circus had passed away from Queenie in the fragrant and peaceful forest. It had not been a deep-rooted desire in her. It had appeared to her as the only means possible of earning her living, as a condition of life more pleasant than the perpetual fidget at Mrs Rainbow's, than the dull oppression of the mode of existence in Alma Terrace, than the hard despotism of Button's. Now she had found a sphere that suited her exactly. It was full of beauty and calm, and so commended itself to her innate artistic sense; it was a home of love and true piety, and so was a

sweet resting-place suited to her moral sense. She could stretch her limbs and swell her lungs on the heath among the forest tracts, and enjoy physical life. Wild nature proved an inexhaustible storehouse of interest, ever feeding her intellectual life.

But when Queenie came to ask herself whether Rab was as congenial to her as was the life in Delamere Forest, then she faltered in her answer. Rab was a better man than he had been represented. He had been bad. Usage goes a long way towards effacing dislike to what is ugly. She had thought him at one time very ugly, then had come to consider him plain. Now she did not consider about his features; she regarded them as passable. He certainly had good eyes, full of intelligence and a kindly light. He who had been a loafer was now an energetic keeper. His conversation conveyed information; he earned a wage, had a nice cottage pleasantly situated, and could maintain a wife.

One who could love so faithfully without encouragement, and out of love break with bad habits and reform himself radically, was surely the man on whom she could rely to be true and devoted through life. Were she to break off her engagement to Rab it would drive him desperate.

Queenie said to herself,—"I am not too good for him. I am not good enough. Why, then, do I hesitate? Why am I so uneasy?"

And the answer came—"I do not love him."

That was at the bottom of all. She could not get further than liking Rab. Would she be able to love him when she became his wife? Was it right for her to become his wife when no love for him woke in her heart? when she saw no prospect of love coming? How would he endure that—to have a wife and to discover that she respected him, but did not, could not, love him? When she questioned herself further, and asked why she did not, could not love him, her pulses beat faster, her cheek mantled; she started from her place and walked fast over the sandy soil, and strove to stifle the answer that rose up in her soul, for it frightened her. She went to the edge of the mere, to the point where the little dyke had been cut by Rab to let the water flow to the low plot that was to become a willow bed. A soft haze like steam hung over the water and tops of the trees, playing among the heads of the pines, and trailing over the silver surface of the mere. The sun shone, but was shorn of all its gold—it was as a burnished silver salver set in the sky, and the blue of the heavens was suspected rather than seen, athwart the gauzy veil. The air was warm, very little wind was stirring, and that only at long intervals. Nature was dozing in the doze that precedes death, beautiful in her last sleep, and still, so that but for the occasional sigh that stirred the leaves and brought them down in a

golden shower, and clouded momentarily the polished face of the lake, it might have been thought that all life, all motion, was extinct.

Water was flowing through the cutting formed by Rab, and a flotilla of fallen leaves had gathered about the mouth through which the current ran. The leaves were of all sorts—maple, beech, birch, plane, oak, bramble; of all colours—yellow, crimson, brown and green.

As Queenie stood watching the clear stream flowing through the cutting, she observed the leaves detach themselves from their fellows, enter the current and sweep along with it, sometimes singly, sometimes in combinations of two or more together. Their fates were different. Some shipped their way along without ill hap, and dived into the deep cleft cut through the prehistoric burial mound. Some caught against a fibre of heath-root, and remained at anchor. Some couples parted; one lagged behind, then the foremost caught against the bank; that which had been first arrested disengaged itself, swam onwards, caught up its partner, and carried it forward with it or else remained alongside, or even, occasionally, sailed by with callous disregard.

It amused Queenie to watch the leaves—to see which associated together, and how they got along together. Then she saw a little primrose-tinted birch leaf, light as a feather, shoot from the flotilla pursued by a dull, brown, oak leaf.

"There am I—there is Rab!" said Queenie. "And see! ahead is poor Andrew struggling along with that wicked Ada."

"Andrew is not ahead; he is at your side."

Queenie started, as though shot through the heart, and turned white. Had he heard what she had said? Had he divined her thoughts? She hardly ventured a glance at his face. That glimpse sufficed to show him to be sad and careworn.

"What are you doing here, little cousin?"

"Andrew—amusing myself!"

"What at?"

"Only watching the autumn leaves."

She pointed to the two pairs sailing along the stream.

"Ada and I—you and Rab; is it so?" he spoke and sighed.

"Yes, Andrew," she sighed in echo.

Neither spoke. They were watching the leaves. The first pair consisted of a beech leaf and a dark green, prickly holly leaf. They made their way slowly—the beech leaf held by the needles of the holly. Then suddenly, whether caught by a puff of air, or by a ripple of the water, the beech leaf detached itself; and at that moment, moved by the same force, the birch foil escaped from its companion, shot along the stream, caught up the leaf of beech, and the two slid along together, leaving their companions grounded.

Queenie started and withdrew from the streamlet, her brow flaming. Andrew followed her. He did not altogether understand the mystery of the leaves; did not know which represented himself and which the others named, consequently he was unable to see what had produced such agitation in the girl at his side. Queenie seated herself on a bank of dry heather. She endeavoured to conceal her confusion under an appearance of ill-humour.

"What have you come here for, Andrew? I wished to be left to myself."

"I came to see you."

"And I did not want you to come."

"Queenie! matters have reached a crisis. I have been forced to pay you a visit. I inquired after you from Rainbow. He would give me no information. Then, by a lucky chance, I discovered your hiding place."

"Lucky! I think it the reverse."

"I daresay. It is no lucky matter that brings me here. So, Queenie, is it to be as you said—Rab and you?"

"Yes, Andrew."

"I suppose I must wish you joy."

He spoke with an effort.

Then she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears. He did not speak, but quietly took a place by her side.

"Well, Queenie, we all have our troubles, our sorrows, our disappointments. We must bear them. It is God's will, and by them He fashions us to the shape He chooses."

She raised her head and looked in his eyes.

"Andrew, I do not love him, and yet I have promised to marry him. I do not think that it will ever be possible for me to love him with the love that is due from a wife. Tell me, ought I to take Rab? Ought I to marry one who has not, and never can, have my heart?"

He shrank from a reply. What could he answer? Had he not done that very thing which she meditated? He left her question unresponded to.

"Let us leave that matter to be considered at another time," said he. "I have come to tell you how matters stand with us at Button's."

"How? Matters between you and Ada?"

He shook his head.

"What, then?"

"All is ruined. Mr Button took advantage of the trust reposed in him by my father, and sold the land and factory—everything—to Brundrith, and ran off to America with the money. We are left in a desperate position—father and I thrown out of work, bailiffs in the house on account of Button's debts; the only thing saved is your little fortune. That my father had secured. He holds a mortgage on the

estate for three thousand pounds, or thereabouts, which is the amount bequeathed by your father. I am so thankful that has been preserved, but my father is an upright man. He thought to make much more for you out of the factory than could have been made out of the South American bonds. *You* are in no worse position than you were. It is *we* who are in a bad way, but I do not feel discouraged; I have in me the will and the power to work."

"And Ada! how does she bear it?"

"I have not been able to see much of her. I do not know that she realises the terrible downfall She will have to leave Button's."

"Andrew," said Queenie, "as to my money, I am glad it is safe, not on my own account but on yours—that is to say on your account, your wife's and uncle's. I do not want it. It can do me no good. It may serve you in this difficulty, and help you to get out of your present distress. I do not understand about mortgages, and bonds, and investments. You can, I suppose, get my money out from that into which it has been put. Well, take it; do with it what you will. I am content; I shall be very happy to think it has been a means of relief to you. I ask but one thing in return. Tell me, what I am to do about Rab? I cannot love him—I cannot love him, for—"

He put out his hand to ward off more words.

"Queenie," said he firmly, "let me say it—not you. It is perhaps better spoken than allowed to remain burning under cover. You and I have loved each other ever since we knew each other. What you saw in me I cannot think, but it was so—somehow we came to care for each other very, very much. You, in your fresh, innocent, child-like frankness, told me as much! I said nothing, or very little, yet you knew you were dear to me. Then came my father's influence, and my doubts about you on account of your education, and I flung myself from you at the feet of another, whom"—he lowered his voice—"I did not love, and who I now know, from her own lips, has never loved me. Such is the condition of affairs. We parted on the rail at Button's, and then—if there had been any secret between us before, all was revealed at that time to each other. We knew each other's hearts then. But I was mad; I dashed headlong into an union that promised fair, though it was one against which my heart protested. Now it is done, it cannot be undone. I know, Queenie, that we must not meet. I know that we must fight against that which is in our hearts. I do not blame anyone but myself, least of all my wife; for I was wrong in offering her my heart when it was given to another—to you. You and I have bravely struggled against ourselves, and, Queenie,

we will struggle on. I am bound to Ada, and I will never be false to her in any way, as far as lies in my power. Now, Queenie, you ask me if I counsel your doing that which I did. No! a thousand times no! Unless you love, do not marry. You prepare for yourself unspeakable anguish and—"

Suddenly, overcome by her impulses, Queenie threw herself in his arms.

"My poor Andrew! My dear Andrew—I can never love any but you."

He quietly, gently unlaced her arms that clasped him, raised her weeping face from his breast, and thrust her from him.

"Queenie," he said, "you must be a brave little girl and do what is right. I would not have spoken, but that there was no advantage in concealment, and it empowered me to say plainly what my advice was. Hear me out. There is no hurry. You are young. Ask Rab to give you time. You may not be able to love him now. In a year or two it may be different. Then—then take him, but not till you are sure you can give him what you vow shall be his. Now, as to your money. Dear child, we cannot owe that to you. I came here to assure you of its safety, to assure you that I would see that you lose nothing. I feared you might hear the news of our disaster, and be in alarm for your own inheritance. It shall suffer no further

risk. Now, good-bye once again. Now all is spoken out, and I go to my work and to my trouble; you to yours. Take Rab when you can love him. Do not take him unless you can, or not till love comes. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER IX.

A BROKEN LIFE.

Mrs Gerard was cleaning a copper pan after having made apple jam in it. That was a task she imposed on no one, for she thought that she could trust no one save herself to do it thoroughly, and so obviate all risk of poisoning the family with verdigris.

Whilst thus engaged Rab burst into the house. When Martha looked up she saw that his face was red as blood, his eyes were wild, and his hair in disorder. He cast himself on the bench in the window and drove his fingers through his shaggy hair.

"It is my fate. All is against me. I have struggled, and now it is over."

"What is gone wrong, Rab?"

"Everything. Thrice have I been present when Andrew and Queenie have met. First when they began their acquaintance, then when he got engaged to Ada Button—and now that he is married. It is all up with me!"

"What is it, Rab?"

"It is too hard," said he, and his whole body shook.

"What, Rab? I thought all was going on well now."

"Yes, so it ever is with me. The clouds lift, and then down they come again darker than before. It is night now—black night upon me."

"I do not understand you, Rab," said Martha, abandoning her copper pan, and coming to him in the window. "Brother, you were very happy a little while ago."

"That is true which they said once in chapel—that Providence orders all things, determines who are to be saved and who lost. And them as is to be lost, they may fight against their destiny, they may strive to be good—and it's no use. They must go down and be lost eternally. It is true. I thought it queer teaching when I heard it, and I didn't believe it, I do now. I've proved it in myself."

"Rab! what has come over you?"

His sister strove to take his hand, but he withdrew it.

"I will tell you all. It may do me good. I don't know that anything can; but you are a kind lass, and I'll tell you everything. The first time I saw her—"

"Whom?"

"Queen o' Love, to be sure. There is no other.

The first time I saw her was talking with Andrew Grice, and I thought then I'd never seen a girl as was her equal. She sort of threw a charm over me then, and I could think of nothing but her. Yet even then it was Andrew she talked to, laughed with, to him she gave nuts. And he—he was frightened to be found with a circus girl, as if it were something wicked. I felt a hate for him then, because she chose him out to chat with, and had no eyes, no words for me. That was the first time. Yes—" He paused, put his hand into his breast-pocket, drew out a note-book, opened it and unfurled a leaf. Within lay a withered rose. "There, Martha—she did give me this. I don't know whether to mock me, or because she pitied me. I don't know," he added bitterly, "whether it weren't the doin' o' Providence as had ordained my destruction, drawin' me to damnation, as you draw on a rat to the trap, wi' a trail of annise seed."

"Rab! Rab!" His sister shrank from him. "How can you say these terrible words? You know that she has been a good angel to you."

"Yes—she has been a good angel so far; but now, after she has drawn me up out of shipwreck, she is ready to cast me down the cliffs again. Listen to me, Martha. You know how I saved her life when there came that sinking of the ground by Saltwich Flash, right under the circus. Well, that finished what she

had begun with the yaller rose. After I had held her in my arms, then it was over with me. I could think of nothing but her. She was my sun; I could have light only from her. She was my goal; I could run only to reach her. She was the one pearl for whom I would fish all my life on the chance of bringing her up in my hand."

He beat his brow, then laid his open hand on the table, and proceeded :—

"It is folly that a man should take such a matter to heart. Folks say there are more fishes in the sea than those taken out of it; that there are as many flowers in the field as there were after it has been picked over, as many stars in heaven after it has rained sparks. To me there is only one prize, one flower, one star. I want no others. I can see no others. She did not encourage me. She told me she liked me, but did not love me. She was grateful for the life I had given her, but she would not yield up that life into my keepin'. I was a fool, I suppose, to go on hoping. I saw that she loved Andrew, not me — no, not me. God help me!"

He bowed his head; he could not proceed. Martha remained silent as well.

"Then came Andrew's engagement to Ada Button. It was for money. He did not love her, but she was rich, and his father persuaded him to it, and, perhaps, he was right. The Queen would not suit that serious

family. She and Jabez, who ruled everythin', could not agree, and he would have driven her desperate. Then came the second time that I caught Andrew with Queen of Love. It was when he was partin' with her, after he had bound himself to Ada Button. Then I learned that she loved him, and that, although he was to marry Ada, he still loved Queenie. He could not help it—I mean, he could not help lovin' Queenie, none could; but he should not, loving her, have taken that other woman. Well, Martha, then, when he was married, I thought all was clear before me; that she would get over her fancy for Andrew—and he is a good chap, that I do not deny, and I well knew he would fight agin his love for Queenie, as a sinful thing to harbour. She gave me some encouragement then. She did not say she did love me, but would try her best to do so. Then I was a happy man. Then I sang at my work; I was like a bird in spring. At the time when I was discouraged I did not drink. No ale, no spirits could give me pleasure, could quench the fire that burned in me. I did not try to look at, think of, other girls. He who has seen and been kindled by Queenie can look at, think of no one else. So, when she promised to try to care for me, I rose up and felt strong. All my bad ways fell from me like the cords that went to pieces on the arms of bound Samson. Everythin' smiled and laughed in and about me. The sun and the moon danced in

heaven. Then, presently, whilst I was cuttin' the channel to let the water on to the osier bed, we came to some sort of understandin' that she would take me as her own. Then there was in my heart as the blast of a trumpet."

He leaned his elbow on the table and laid his head on his hand. The sweat ran off his face in streams.

"To-day I was cuttin' osiers for the bed. The boy Fred Fellows was with me. I fastened the twigs together; he did not understand how to take a bind and twist it so that it held. I gave him my knife that he might cut the twigs; and, when I had enough, I hoisted the bundle on my shoulders and went towards the new bed to which the water is let in. I forgot to ask him for the knife again. I came to the place for the willows, and what did I see by the edge of the mere but Queenie and Andrew. If they had not been so full o' each other, they must ha' seen me. This is now the third time I've come upon them when together—and the third time is fatal one way or other. I could not quite hear what they said. I stood at a distance and looked on. They was seated and speakin' to each other, and their eyes were fastened on each other. Then there sprang up in my heart a Roaring Meg of bitterness and foaming hate. What did the man mean—this Andrew, bound to another by his own act—comin' between me and the girl who had promised to be mine? In my fury I

felt for my knife; I could not find it. I could not tell what I had done with it. A guardian angel watched over them. If I had found my knife, Andrew would have been a dead man."

"A guardian angel watched over you, Rab," said Martha—"and saved you from a dreadful crime."

"May be." He put up his other elbow, and threw his head into the hollow of his other hand. "May be. I care not. Then I cast down my osier bundle and clenched my teeth and my fists, and I went round till I could see her face in full, and then I shifted about till I could see his in full. Neither had eyes for me. Neither could see anything save each other. I do not know what they said. I did not go nigh enough to hear. I could not have heard. Roaring Meg—the bitter jet in my veins—was boilin', hissin', spittin' in my ears. I could hear nothin'. Then he stood up—so did she. They were very earnest—he speakin'—and all at once she threw herself into his arms. I cried out. They heard me not. A flame of fire passed before my eyes. When I saw clear again, he was biddin' her leave—wavin' her from him, and himself drawin' back. I was in the wrong; Andrew is not a bad man. Can he help it that he loves her? It is his misfortun', it is his misery; as it is my misfortun' and my misery. He will do her no wrong. He knows what is right and he will do it. No—I am glad I did not kill him. I pity him as I pity myself. He and I

love the same Queen of Love, and she can never be his—and now I know that she can never be mine."

"Not yours!—"

"No. Andrew stands between us. She loves him. He cannot help it—it is so ordained. It is inscribed on the black heaven that scowls down on us, that he should love her, and she him, who are and must now be separated. It is woe to him. It is woe to her. It is woe to me. We three must bear this consumin' fire eatin' into our hearts, a fire ever burnin', a worm ever bitin', a fire never quenched, a worm never glutted."

He clasped his head in both hands, and a gulp like a sob burst from his throat. Martha trembled. She saw how deep was the agony through which Rab was passing, and she could do nothing to help him. A man sobs but twice in life—once when his heart is broken by the woman he has loved; once when he stands self-convicted and penitent under the eye of God.

"She cannot be mine," he said slowly. "I could not take her, knowin' that her heart was elsewhere. It would be too cruel to her to constrain her to fight the battle between dooty and her own heart. He has to do that. It would be a twofold pain to me to hold her in my arms and know that the shell was mine, the spirit was elsewhere; to see her every day strivin' desperate like to force a love that would not come. I

must consider her. She knows that Andrew is not for her; and with time she may come to think of him with more calmness. But it would make the struggle much more cruel if she had at the same time to pretend to care for me, and to know that I saw through it all and was suffering."

"Then what will you do, Rab?"

"I do not know. I cannot stay here and see her. It would be a daily trial to her; it would be bad for myself. Gerard, I dare be bound, can get me shifted to some other station. I must go. But keep little Queen of Love here. There is no one else but me to protect her, and she needs protection from herself. I cannot tell—man is weak, and principles give way. She must be protected also from Andrew."

Rab stood up. The strong man looked as if he had passed through a long sickness; he shook, he seemed haggard. He picked up the withered rose, and folded it again in his pocket-book, and replaced it near his heart. Then he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Martha."

"Are you going?"

He nodded.

"Whither?"

"I cannot tell. My head swims."

CHAPTER X.

FRESH TIDINGS.

ANDREW walked on to Saltwich, his mind occupied by many cares that not only possessed his mind but oppressed his heart. The future before him was dark. Personally he concerned himself very little about the defeat of the scheme which was to have landed him in opulence. He was not ambitious to be rich. His tastes were simple, and he was humble minded. That which touched him to the quick was the ruin in his domestic happiness. There was no prospect of any improvement in his relations to Ada. If she had not been softened by what had happened, bowed to shame by her father's conduct, nothing would avail. Hard and malicious she would remain to the end of the sad chapter of their married life.

Andrew had been accustomed to work as a waller for his living, and to walling he would return. He

could earn from fifteen to eighteen shillings per week, and there was the hope before him of rising, like his father, to be an overlooker at forty shillings.

But he was not alone. Alone he would have faced the prospect cheerfully; but, linked to Ada, he saw in it a vista of contrarieties, recrimination, heartburning. He was united to a woman he could never love, and was separated from her to whom still his heart clung. He dared not allow his mind to rest on Queenie. He dared not make further inquiries about her lest he should excite the jealousy of his wife; if he did seek her and concern himself for her, it must be in secret, with all precaution, as though he were committing a crime. How would his father bear his disappointment? What would he do? Jabez had offended Brundrith too seriously to be taken back into his service, even if Jabez desired it; and that was not probable. In all likelihood "Hammer" Grice would seek a situation in a Northwich or Winsford salt factory; his ability was known, he had a large body of adherents at his back who would urge his claims, and an employer would gratify this party by engaging him; but it would be a severe blow to "Hammer" to have to leave a town where he had been a figure of so much consequence and to have to beat out for himself a career elsewhere. Elsewhere there were to be found

other men, positive, self-assertive, who would not step aside to make way for the newcomer.

The young heart is rarely hopeless. Its sky, however dark, is not without a glimpse of the blue. But to Andrew there was no lightening of the shadows, no gleam to lure him on.

As Andrew walked through the forest, he had no eyes for the wild nature that surrounded him—contrary to his wont, which was to rejoice in all that was fresh and beautiful. A squirrel watched him with bright eyes, and gathered from his manner that it need apprehend no danger from him; it therefore disdained to abandon the cone it was shredding for the seeds. Crows croaked; he had no ear for their harsh notes. Yellow leaves strewed the road, as though it had been strewn with gold. In the Norse legend, the flying hero, escaping the treachery of the Swedish king, scattered bezants in his way as he rode from Upsala, and his pursuers halted to collect them. So was the flying sun scattering autumn gold over every path by which he withdrew.

On reaching the little inn where he had slept on a previous visit to Delamere, Andrew entered and asked for bread and cheese, and found the same two men seated there as he had seen and listened to on the former occasion. And, precisely as before, so now did the ill-humour of their wives, and their

own indifference to it, form the seasoning of their conversation.

Again Andrew listened and wondered, as he had wondered before, at the bluntness of the feelings of these fellows, who could go on, year by year, enduring their domestic miseries, perhaps wantonly provoking them, and always bearing them with light heart. Was drink the panacea for such evils? Did it deaden the nerve that it no longer felt acute pain? Andrew mused, sighed, paid for his simple meal and left.

On reaching Saltwich, Andrew's way led past the paperhanger's shop. He found Mr Poles at his door, in conversation with Mr Nottershaw and Mrs Rainbow, and, the moment they caught sight of him, they signed to him to join them.

Mrs Rainbow had received a letter from Seth White, who was back in Scarborough. Mrs Rainbow, being unable herself to read, and not being confident of the ability or reticence of her neighbours, was wont, on the receipt of a letter, to apply to Mr Poles to decipher it for her and write the reply. She supplied the paperhanger with eggs and fruit, and she accorded him her custom, when she repapered a bedroom, which was once in fifteen years; and then she purchased of him four pieces at fourpence per piece. As she gave him her custom, she considered that she had a right to his services *gratis*

in such a matter as the conduct of her correspondence. Mr Poles did not mix freely in the same society as that in which Mrs Rainbow moved, consequently he was not likely to divulge those matters contained in her letters which were not for the public ear.

On receiving a letter, which the postman assured her was for herself, Mrs Rainbow had gone with it to the paperhanger's. John Nottershaw came into the shop just after Poles had read the letter aloud to the lady, and, as it contained matter of importance that concerned Nottershaw, he obtained permission from Rab's mother to give him a sight of it.

Seth White began by informing Mrs Rainbow that, on mature consideration, thinking that the circus was overstocked with male riders and tumblers, he had come to the opinion that it would be advisable for him to strike out a new line for himself. Having made the acquaintance of an optician at Scarborough, he had arranged with this man for the loan and ultimate purchase of a telescope. With this glass Seth stationed himself on the Parade. During the day he invited the loungers to look through it at some steamer or coal-barge that was passing, at a penny a peep; at night he was ready to exhibit the crater on the lunar disc, the rings of Saturn, the red spots on Mars, the satellites of Jupiter.

Seth enlarged on his prospects. If the sky re-

mained tolerably clear, he was able to reap a harvest of pence in an evening. He sent his respects to Queenie, and his assurance that it was "Hup with circus riding, at all events for men. But 'an'some gals could do middlin'!" He added that there were more competitors for a vacant place than ever, and "accidenks," which provided vacancies, were fewer than in the good old days. He sent his regards to Rab, and hoped he was doing well. Then this marvellous effusion proceeded—we copy it with all its grammatical errors:—

"By the waye, if you seez Misteer Andru Grise, you give him my complermints. I seed 'is wenerable farther-in-lore pass to-day with a dashing feemal on his harm, and 'ee all bedeked with jowls. I persuaded 'im to 'ave a spy throw my glass, and 'ee guv me saxpince. I knowed the hole chap at oncit. I s'pose he's hout on 'is 'unneymoon. 'Ee didn't know me, in corse, and I didn't make that baold to interdooce myself. I knoze my persition."

Mr Button at Scarborough! Mr Button not gone to America! Why—he had announced at his hotel that he was off to New York, and had engaged his berth in the *Caledonia* under a feigned name.

Had he taken the alarm when he saw Poles? or

was it all a blind against being followed that he had conceived from the first?

What was to be done?

Nottershaw had not hesitated for a moment after having read the letter. He wired to Seth White:—

"Keep eye on Button, and mum's the word. Five pounds reward."

Then he hastened back to Poles, and then it was that he met Andrew Grice returning from the forest.

"Now, then," said the builder, "Andrew, I ain't going to stand nonsense. I'm off to get a warrant, and then I'll have him arrested. It's fraudulent conspiracy. Sorry you've got such a rogue for a father-in-law, Grice, but can't help it—I must get my monies."

"I will go with you," said Andrew. "If we can induce him to refund—and he is sure to have the money with him—you will not take extreme proceedings?"

"I don't care a hang for the man. I want my monies."

"I care for my wife. I must do what I can to save her feelings."

"You'll not give him the hint to slip off?"

"You may trust me, I think, Mr Nottershaw. Besides, it is not to my advantage."

"Excuse me. One is surrounded by rascals. You are right; I know you too well to doubt you."

"I must consider my wife. If you can get him to surrender a fair sum, you will not take further action—we must avoid a scandal."

"I want my monies, not his blood. Let him go with his 'jowls' and his 'dashing feemal' where he likes — through the telescope into Venus, I care naught, and you will be well rid of him."

"Mr Poles," said Andrew, "will you be so good as to run to Button's and tell my father and my wife about my departure. Say I'm off to Scarborough, and add what particulars you like to Ada—except about the dashing female—nothing of that, mind. Spare her all you can."

"We'll tackle the party!" said Nottershaw, rubbing his hands. "Ginger! It will be fun to see him when we come on him and clap him on the back!"

Poles accepted the commission. He was a weak man—too weak to refuse it, and too weak to execute it. He did not tell Andrew to his face that he was indisposed to go to Button's, because he did not like to admit the reasons why he was indisposed. He accepted the commission without serious intention of personally executing it.

Had he been open and declined it, then a whole

series of events that will have to be recorded would never have occurred, and the conclusion of this story would not have been what it must be.

Mr Poles did not deliberately undertake to acquaint Grice and Ada with the fact that Andrew had started for Scarborough, with the formed purpose in his mind not to discharge the office that had been pressed on him. Being an eminently weak man, as said, he received the commission with inward repugnance, and a resolve to delegate it to someone else, as opportunity came, or to postpone the communication till it suited his own convenience.

There is more mischief done in the world by weak people than by wicked people. We guard ourselves against the wicked, we are off our guard with the weak.

The reason why Poles was reluctant to take the message to Grice, and why he actually neglected to do so, must be explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XI

THE BRINE-PAN

JABEZ GRICE was unable to rest after he had heard of the disappearance of Button with the money paid him by Brundrith.

Throughout the day he wandered about the house or grounds. Now and then he entered the factory, examined the works, looked at the wallers, inspected the mill, then came home and pulled out his books, but found himself incapable of fixing his attention on his accounts.

He was beset with difficulties. In the house were the bailiffs. He could not get rid of them if he would. He had not the sum required. He was not bound to pay the drink bill of Tom Button. He could ask no one to relieve him of the annoyance of their presence by advancing the money they demanded. In the interests of morality he sincerely hoped the spirit merchants might not be able to recover the sum owed them.

If the vexation of the presence of these two men had fallen heavily on Ada, Jabez might have reconciled himself to it; but she had retired to her room, and left it for her meals only. She would not enter the kitchen where they sat; she refused to hold communication with them, even to see them. She maintained before her father-in-law a cold indifference of manner that irritated him, because he was himself in agitation of mind and soul.

Grice needed money for current expenses. He knew very well that he would have to leave Button's. A couple of months ago he had possessed savings in the bank; but he had withdrawn every penny, and now had nothing to fall back on, nothing to maintain him till he found work elsewhere.

Jabez had jumped at one resolution, and to that he held fast. He would separate from Andrew. His son was cumbered with that woman Ada, and "Hammer's" eye flared whenever he thought of her. The single alleviation to his distress lay in the consideration that now he would be able to shake himself free from association with Ada. Andrew was married and bound to her—not he. Andrew was a fellow with some good in him, but as he was fettered to that woman, "Hammer" must free himself from one as well as the other.

If Andrew chose to make his peace with Brundrith, let him do so; but he, "Hammer," would never stoop

to express regret for the past and to ask a favour for the future.

He shrank from leaving Saltwich, where he was esteemed and followed. But what was he to do? To return to the drudgery of work under an employer was repugnant to his pride. He had lifted himself out of the artisan class; if he could help it, he would not drop back into it again. Was a fortune to be found only at the bottom of a shaft? Was Button's the only sphere in which his abilities might win him riches and renown? Jabez had a long and shrewd head, and he had looked about him whilst employed on Brundrith's works. He had had other schemes floating before his eyes, and the only difficulty which had occurred as a stumbling-block in the way of starting these schemes had been lack of capital. One of his schemes was connected with the water-carriage on the Weaver Canal. At the time it was conducted by isolated individuals, men who owned each his "flat" or barge, and who acted independently. He was satisfied that an organised service of barges to carry the salt down to the mouth of the Mersey would be of immense advantage to the manufacturers, and would absorb or displace individual venture. Whoever succeeded in this scheme would make his fortune.

All that was required, as a start, was capital for the purchase of several "flats," and the engagement

of men to work them, that would form a nucleus certain to expand. Happily, through his own foresight, everything had not been lost. Queenie's little capital was safe. Why should he not remove it from its present investment, and employ it for his new venture? That would not be cheating his ward. Brundrith would almost certainly desire immediately to free the estate from its charge. He, Grice, would pay her four and a-half per cent. interest out of the profits. He would begin in a small way, gradually crush out all the little men, establish a monopoly, and become as wealthy by this means as he might have become on the salt venture. He resolved on no account to take Andrew into partnership, not that he bore him a grudge, but lest Ada should reap some advantage by it, be made well-to-do, comfortable, happy. She deserved to suffer mortification and poverty on account of the dishonesty of her father.

Some fine day in the future he would drive by the red brick cottage in which she and Andrew "pigged it," as Grice said to himself, and he would laugh to observe her haggling with Mrs Rainbow over the price of a peck of potatoes, or shaking the mats on the doorstep.

Suppose he made a fortune! He would leave it all to the missionaries, or to found a chapel—not to Andrew, lest Ada should enjoy it. Hatred of his daughter-in-law, the outcome of wounded pride, was

now the strongest passion animating "Hammer"; it oozed up between the joints of all his thoughts; it entered into and poisoned all his expectations. Then his mind turned to Phineas Poles, the sheep-faced—an intimate friend, as far as intimacy can exist between one who commands and another who is commanded.

Poles was credited with being well off. He had no family, lived in a modest way, subscribed liberally to charities, did much business in various ways, in and around Saltwich, and must, accordingly, have made money. If he had made it, he must have laid it by. It was owing to this, as much as to his perfect respectability, that Mr Poles was put forward as a man of prominence in the serious world. His sheepish face proclaimed his guilelessness; his comfortable little property assured him regard; his contracted intellect qualified him to follow a leader with docility.

If Grice had controlled the opinions of Poles in matters religious, political, philanthropical, educational and sanitary, it was probable that he would have little difficulty with him in negotiating a loan on so sound a security as the mortgage.

Accordingly, Jabez resolved on applying to Phineas, not in an obsequious, apologetic manner, as soliciting a favour, but haughtily, as conferring a favour.

Poles, undoubtedly, had made money. It must have come in through several channels; and though

only as a dribble through some of them, yet a combination of dribbles makes an abundant stream. All mighty rivers are, in fact, but the combination of confluent dribbles.

Poles hung paper, and supplied the papers; he painted, he plumbed, he framed pictures and sold them; he illuminated addresses in the Old English characters; he even heraldically decorated carriage panels. He sold valentines and funeral mementos. Recently he had added to his business the disposal of wickerwork baskets.

The public reckoned that Mr Poles made money by all these means. It was known that at his breakfast he never went beyond a rasher, and at his dinner a chop or steak—that he was very economical about his clothes—never eating anything fatty without pinning himself about with napkins. He spent very little money, therefore he saved a great deal. Rumour set him down as a capitalist.

Jabez sought him in his shop.

"How do you do, Phineas?"

"Middlin', thanky, Jabez. Got an elongation of the uvula and a hirritation of the glottis; I've gargled alum and cayenne but have not been relieved. Would you condescend to look down my throat and pass an opinion? Dr Birch recommends that the uvula should be snipped, and a slice taken

from the tonsils; they are enlarged and ulcerated. Do, please, look. Sorry about this affair of Button."

"It is touching that I have come."

"My dear life, you don't say so!"

"That scoundrel, Tom Button, has sold house, land, factory, everything to Brundrith, and has bolted with the proceeds; that you know — but what you do not know is that I have three thousand pounds secured on it by mortgage."

"I'm glad to hear it. I feared all was gone."

"It is safe as the Bank of England, and I want you, Poles, to take over the mortgage and find me upon it the money I want."

"You are sure it is safe? After Button's bolt nothing seems safe."

"There is the land. Brundrith has it. Brundrith has taken it burdened with the mortgage. You can't lose a penny. I won't deal with Brundrith; we are not on good terms."

"Have you the mortgage with you?"

"Here it is. Look it over."

Poles perused the deed with attention.

"Three thousand pounds," said he. "But would you first look down my throat; the uvula is like a bell-rope, it tickles me, and I can't think of anything through the irritation."

"Presently. But you will take the mortgage?"

"And the glottis—Dr Birch says it is pink as a cherry."

"You will furnish me with the money?"

"My dear Jabez! All my money is locked up in house property. I couldn't do what you propose, not till my throat was better; and I couldn't sell house property right off on end. Do you pass your opinion on my tonsils."

This conversation took place some hours before Poles read the letter of Seth White to Mrs Rainbow. Now it may be guessed why Mr Poles shrank from going to Button's. He knew that he was irresolute and weak. He knew how resolved and strong Grice was. He feared lest, in another interview, Grice should over-persuade him, and force him to find the money with which he was reluctant to part. When he had received the commission,—

"Dear, dear!" said Phineas, "the evening chills are bad for sore throats. I'll see; if anyone comes this way, I'll send him; but it might prove fatal for me with my elongated uvula to breathe the night air, impregnated with the savour of the fall of the leaf. I'll not be going to Button's till to-morrow, but I'll send if I have the opportunity. Grice is an overpowering man, and after this affair of Tom Button, one can't be too cautious."

When "Hammer" Grice returned to Button's, Ada met him at the door with the question,—

"Where is Andrew?"

"How can I say," answered Jabez; "you must ask someone else."

"Someone else!" exclaimed Ada; "you insult me!"

"I don't understand you."

"I know very well whom you mean by Someone else. It is that Someone else who takes him away from me when I am in trouble, when the house is in an upset, when I have lost my father, when ruin stares me in the face — and you connive at his desertion."

"I do not pretend to fathom your hints and sneers."

"A fine scandal this will cause in your solemn and canting world," said Ada with bitterness and heat. "A pretty scandal when it gets abroad that pious Grice's pious son is dancing round a circus girl, to the neglect of his newly-married wife."

Jabez stared at his daughter-in-law, and his jaw fell. Was this true? That it was possible, he saw at a glance. It was no secret to him that Andrew was deeply attached to Queenie. Andrew had shown, by the persistence with which he had urged her rights, that he still cared for her. Now that Ada—the hated Ada—was no more desirable as weighted with lands, and plated with gold—was it possible that Andrew meditated breaking the

bonds laid on him, and escaping to her whom he really loved?

The thought filled Jabez with dismay. It numbed his brain, it sickened his heart. If this were to happen, then it would prove an almost fatal blow to his moral supremacy in Saltwich. But further —it would mean more than that—that Andrew would block his way in the realisation of his new scheme, would insist that the capital of Queenie was not employed in lighters, invested to Grice's advantage in a manner justifiable, but not perhaps legitimate.

With this new trouble haunting the chambers of his soul, Grice went into the factory.

The day-gang was leaving. The short winter period of light was at an end, darkness was settling down over the land and filling every shed with night, casting shadows over everything that was bright, veiling all forms with a drapery of crape. Jabez Grice went into the store. He lighted a lantern and looked about him. The only men now engaged in the factory were a couple of wallers and a stoker. The shed he was in was empty of hands. He looked at his rotator and mill—the invention that was to have brought him so much money, but which now would grind wealth for Brundrith. His heart glowed within him, glowed with resentment against every one and everything—

against Andrew for this new scandal, against Poles for not coming to his aid, against Ada for the many humiliations to which she had subjected him, against the spirit merchant for putting the bailiffs into the house, against Tom Button for his rascality, against Brundrith for having reaped where he had sown. Looking at his machine, this last consideration for a moment prevailed over his other resentments. He snatched at a long handled hammer, set down the lantern, and with mighty blows beat to pieces every part of the mechanism that he could reach, and which he was capable of destroying. The sweat ran off his brow. His teeth were clenched, his breath came in snorts through his distended nostrils. In a quarter of an hour he had shattered or disabled machinery that had cost hundreds of pounds to construct. If it had been possible he would have effaced every indication of the method whereby the object aimed at was attained. Then, panting with exertion, his head reeling with excitement, he cast the hammer on one side, snatched up the lantern, strode through the stove-room, where the intense heat struck him in the face like a fire-blast, dried up the moisture streaming from his pores, and shrivelled his hair, and next moment he threw open the door into the wych-house and entered. The steam rolled in his face and blinded him. In his intoxication of resentment, without considering

why he was there, without forethought, without purpose, he strode forwards, tripped on the rib that edged the hurdles, and in a moment went over, with the lantern in his hand, into the pan of boiling brine.

CHAPTER XII.

A MAN OF SALT.

No cry for help broke from the man in falling. No shriek of agony was heard when he went into the scalding fluid.

The brine-pans were attended by two wallers, one on each side, holding wooden rakes. One of these saw Grice stumble and pitch into the vessel, and he screamed to his fellow for aid.

Jabez had fallen his length in the shallow pan—no pan exceeds eighteen inches in depth. He at once staggered to his feet. The hand that held the lantern had not been submerged. Instead of relaxing his hold of it, the spasm of pain had made him grip the metal ring more firmly. Bewildered, enveloped in steam, Grice was battling with the boiling waves, plunging forward into the middle of the pan, wading further up it, towards the furnace.

The wallers called to him, but he did not hear,

signed to him, but he did not see. He reeled in his agony, went down on his knees, was up again, and then, caught by the men's rakes, was dragged to the edge, along with a salt scum that formed a foam about him, and was drawn out into the "stand-inside," then further upon the "hurdles." The hot brine that ran off his sodden clothes—the hot cloth itself—scalded the arms and hands of the men as they heaved him out of the pan.* Then the wallers shouted for the stoker, Robert Gelley, who was below, at the fire under the pan. He came up at a run. The three together lifted Grice in their arms, carried him into the store, and leaned him against some loaves of salt.

"Cut along, Jim! run for a doctor," said one of the wallers to his mate.

"It is useless," said Grice. "I've seen a score go in, and none recover. I want no doctor."

He paused and raised an arm. Already the salt was crystallising on the sodden sleeve, and as he lifted his arm the cloth cracked.

"Go to the house," he ordered; "bid them come—whoever are there—Andrew, if back, and Wilkes."

Jim departed.

* The reader will hardly credit the particulars of this struggle in the boiling brine, and what ensues. The writer gathered them on the spot from an eye-witness of similar accidents.

Gas had not been introduced into the factory. The distance from Saltwich, and the precipitation with which the works had been started, had prevented this being done. Consequently, the factory was lighted with lamps. There was no lamp in the storehouse, as this was not occupied by workmen during the night. The stoker unhitched a lamp from the wall of the wych-house, and brought it where Grice lay, for the lantern emitted but a feeble glimmer through its smoked sides, over which, moreover, salt was forming like frost leaves on a window pane.

Sam Verdin, the waller, and Robert Gelley, the stoker, were alone with the parboiled man. Jim had gone to summon his relations. They fetched bags of table salt that had been ground in the mill of Grice's invention, and arranged them under his shoulders and head. He would not allow himself to be laid prostrate. He insisted on being given a sitting posture, but with an incline backwards. When he was made as easy as was possible,—

"Verdin!" said Grice, "you know me; you have been with me these fourteen years. Now, it's a dying man speaks to you; it's no use holding out hopes; I know there are none. There can be none to him as has gone into a pan. I've seen many cases. I have an hour, perhaps I have two—not more—nor shall I be conscious all of that time. So I must make haste—haste with what I have to say. No doctor on earth

can help, can prolong life, can lessen my pain. It's up with me. There's one or two things I care for before I go. My call has come, and I'm not afraid. I'm ready. I have been ready for my call forty years. I've been a leader and a light to them as sat in darkness. I've been a standard-bearer in Israel. I've been a prophet in Jewry. Now I want you to do one thing for me."

"I'll do it, Grice."

"I'd have you, when scaling your pan, drive the chisel through the bottom in three or four places and damage it all you can. I don't want Brundrith to have all profits out of his bargain. He spoiled my game and I'll spoil his as much as I can. You understand?"

"Yes, 'Hammer.'"

"Stay," said Jabez, "when I think on it, I know of a better way. When the brine is all evaporated, let Robert keep his fires up furious, mass on the burgey, make the draught strong that the bottom of the pan may become red hot; then, Verdin, you can drive holes through with ease and riddle it well with a crowbar."

The two workmen looked in each other's faces and signed to each other. What they said without words was, "Humour him, consent, but darn us if we do it."

Jabez remained silent for a few minutes, contending with his anguish. Then he continued:—

"There's something better than this that I lay on you as a dying man's injunction. You two fellows cut or unfasten the nuts and clamps that hold up the pump on the beams; let it fall down the shaft, and it will sink into the brine-run. That will spoil the shaft for ever. Brundrith will never be able to get it up; I doubt if he can put another down in the same place. It will be a damage to him of a thousand pounds. You'll do that for me?"

"Yes, Grice."

At this moment Wilkes entered. He was greatly agitated and alarmed.

"Jabez! Good gracious! This is too horrible! I hope—I hope and pray you have not been gravely scalded."

"Gravely!—about as gravely as may be. Thanks be—my head did not go under water."

"Jabez!—you suffer."

"Of course I suffer. A chap don't get into boiling brine and come out without pain."

"I've sent for the doctor on Ada's horse."

"It's waste of money. I have not an hour's life left in me."

Wilkes signed to the two workmen to withdraw. The men obeyed, retreating to the door of the stove-house, where they remained within call, but out of earshot, talking in whispers.

"Jabez, old fellow," said Wilkes, "this is a ter-

rible affair; if it be as you say, and as I fear, no time is to be lost. You must prepare for the great change."

"I've been prepared these forty years."

"Yes, old fellow, in a general way; but have you nothing of which to repent?"

"Repent! What do you mean? Repentance is not for such as me. I had done with that forty years ago."

"I mean—have you committed no wrong to anyone, acted in any way wrong, anything for which to be sorry?"

"Sorry! I!—committed wrong? I! I am one of the Elect. I can do no wrong. I have done only what is right and good these forty years. I am sealed." Then, with a gesture of impatience, "This ain't the sort of comfort you should give. You've been going back to the weak and beggarly elements for some time, Ezekiel."

"But, surely, Jabez—how about Queenie Sant—and her money?"

"Her money!" repeated "Hammer," slightly raising himself and staring round.

He saw Ada enter. She stood startled, awed and cold, looking at her father-in-law with stony eyes, and without uttering a word.

"Her money!" "Hammer" turned his head from Ada to Wilkes. "Yes; I am glad you spoke of that.

It might have escaped me. Queenie's money. When I am gone, Andrew will step into my place as trustee. He will be responsible for her money. Wilkes, keep your eye on him. Though she is not akin to you, you take an interest in her. Look after her concerns."

"You may be sure I will do that."

"Yes, do so, lest Ada get any advantage out of Queenie's money. Do not let Andrew make use of the money so as to advance himself and make *her* position"—he looked round at Ada—"make her position more tolerable. Take care that he invests the money so as not to be of any use to himself, lest *she*" —he again looked at Ada—"lest she get more comforts than she deserves. Do not let him borrow it so as to extricate himself out of temporary difficulties he may be in. Do not allow him to speculate with it"—again he glanced at Ada—"lest the speculation should succeed, and *she* be lifted out of beggary. Mind that!"

He drew a heavy breath that rattled in his chest, and he righted his head on the bags. He could not raise it; his hair was stuck to the canvas by salt. Although his head had not gone under water, yet the brine, spirting about as he fell and as he floundered, had dropped on his hair and wetted it. The moisture now evaporated and the brine crystallised, and in crystallising had sealed his dark hair to the bags on which his head reposed.

A strange and ghastly transformation had come over the man as the brine dried on his clothes. First there ran over him a pallid tinge as though he were being covered by a growth of mildew. Then the whiteness intensified, and every particle of his clothing which had been immersed or was splashed was covered with a film of salt like the formation of rime, then became more dense, so as to resemble a powdering of snow.

The dark fringe of hair that encircled his face, running from his cheekbones under his chin, was frosted; it changed from black to white, as though, with the deadly pangs he endured, his hair was bleaching.

"Ezekiel Wilkes, Sam Verdin, Robert Gelley, Jim —all!" said Jabez, "I'm going fast out o' this vale of misery and rascality into the blessed land of Total Abstinence from everything as I don't approve of, where there are no public-houses, no skipping-ropes, no butterflies nor vanities, no spangles, no tight-rope dancing and no circuses, where"—he tore his hair from the bags, as he forcibly raised his head and glared at his daughter-in-law,—"and where there are no Ada Button's." He let his head fall again. "I'm going to that blessed land from out of which I shall look as from a window and see my enemies burning, burning—for ever and ever, Amen! I have done."

He clenched his teeth. His solid jaw set like a

steel rat-trap. His heavy brows contracted to a frown, and his face became scarlet. His eyes looked straight before him, and a glaze came into the irises, as though the salt had entered them also, and was frosting and obscuring them.

His bosom laboured, he breathed heavily, noisily. Wilkes spoke to him, but received no answer. Not a cry, not a moan escaped his set lips. How great was the anguish he endured might be conjectured, but could not be gathered from any token he gave. Strong, resolute, dauntless the man had been through life, he was strong, resolute, dauntless in death. Gradually his breathing became more difficult. So little token of life did he give, that Sam whispered to Jim,—

"He's asleep."

Then Ada, looking deadly white, withdrew silently, and as she opened the door to escape witnessing the last scene, the surgeon entered.

As the waft of cold air swept through the shed and blew over the face of the sufferer, he snorted—defiantly it seemed, as though about to encounter a political or religious antagonist, and then the whiteness that was spread over his clothing extended also to his features, the rigidity of his garments communicated itself to his muscles. The heavy jaw fell, as though he were opening his mouth to command attention, and then stiffened. The contracted brows set hard

in their contraction. Wilkes, who had passed his arm under the back of his brother-in-law, withdrew it with a sigh.

Jabez Grice had passed into the World of Great Surprises, where the first and greatest surprise that awaits man is the vision of himself, not as he supposed, believed himself to be, but as he REALLY IS.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TERRIER.

ADA had withdrawn from the salt store to avoid the last scene, and had returned to the house. She did not enter it immediately; she halted moodily on the doorstep.

Ada had entertained no affection for her father-in-law. She was shocked at the accident—in her cold fashion she pitied the man for his sufferings—but she said to herself she could render no assistance; the sight of her incensed the dying man, and, therefore, she were better away. With his last words, he had shown that resentment against her rankled in his heart, unsubdued by the pangs his body endured. She was no hypocrite to feign love and regret for a man who had disliked her, and who had been repugnant to herself. But now came the consideration. What was she to do? Where was Andrew? She was exposed to every sort of annoyance, and her

husband, her proper protector, had chosen to absent himself.

Again she asked, what was she to do?

She was no longer mistress in her own house, which was in the charge of the bailiffs. Jemina was in a condition verging on insubordination; would ask for her wages and depart unless these men were withdrawn. Then, what was she to do? She would not demean herself to cook and bake for these bailiffs; and further, when the dead man was brought into the house, she was wholly unprepared for the novel and unpleasant obligations that might be imposed upon her.

Ada entertained an unreasoning dread of death. She could not endure the thought of remaining in the house, with the corpse, till the funeral. Grice's room was immediately over that in which the meals were served; it adjoined her own, separated from it by a thin plaster partition,

Grice alive had been objectionable, dead he would be intolerable.

Ada had made no friends in Saltwich. There was no one in the neighbourhood whom she could ask to receive her.

By the death of Jabez Grice, and the departure of Andrew, she was left in the society of Wilkes, whom she had offended.

The desertion by Andrew had put her in one

of the most desperate predicaments in which she could have conceived herself placed. Her sour heart became more acrid with resentment towards her husband.

Where was he? He had parted in dudgeon, taking offence at some words she had said. No doubt he had gone to Queenie. He concerned himself about Queenie more than about herself. He had taken up Queenie's cause against his father; he had never interfered on his wife's behalf with "Hammer." If he had not gone to her, why was he away so long? Andrew knew that she was in difficulties, and yet he deliberately absented himself.

Not a touch of self-reproach mingled with her meditation. It never occurred to her that she might have so embittered the life of her husband as to have driven him to desperation.

"There they come!" exclaimed Ada as she saw the four men—Wilkes, Sam, Jim and Robert Gelley—issue from the factory and approach the house, bearing the dead Jabez Grice between them. As he was brought nearer he seemed to be a snow man whom they had picked up, and who, on being taken into the house, would dissolve. "I will not remain! I cannot endure this!"

She darted within to be out of the way, and retreated to her own room. In such a house, square as a die, again the fact became obvious that every sound

was audible. She heard each step as the bearers carried the corpse up the steep stair; she heard the whispers of the bailiffs and of Jemima, who had issued from the kitchen, and stood watching the scramble of the bearers with their white load up the steep stairs. She heard the bang and creak of the banister as, on the narrow stair, one of the bearers swung himself against it, or leaned heavily upon it in the labour of ascent. She heard each low-breathed word of advice and encouragement spoken by one to the other.

Then ensued the trampling in the adjoining room. She trusted she would not be asked to go in, asked for anything that might be required. Go in she would not. Help she could not directly. She would commit her keys to Jemima, and let her attend to the requirements of Wilkes and the other three.

Then she locked her door.

Presently the men descended.

Remain in that house, divided by a thin partition from the corpse, she would not.

Ada was not superstitious, but she was unacquainted with death. She had never looked in the face of the dead. She was not unaware that she had incurred the animosity of the man between whom and her intervened six inches of lath and plaster. What if he were not dead—if he were in a swoon only? What if, in the stillness of the night, he were to wake up

and wander about the house? What if, waking up, he were mad with pain, and in his madness broke into her room to vent on her his resentment? She had locked her door. Ay! but he might break through the plaster. She had heard of such cases as men supposed to be dead coming to life again. What more likely than that, under his suffering, "Hammer" had fainted? He had but to drive his foot against the wall, and laths would fly and plaster fall down. Then he would thrust his hands in and rip and break till he could get his scarlet face through, with the frosty, crystallised hair bristling round it, and then work in shoulders and body, and so reach her, and in his rage and agony rip her as he had ripped the wall.

"I will not stand this! I will not stay here! I will find Andrew!"

In nervous terror, but without her face being more blanched than usual, or any quiver in the muscles of her limbs, Ada put together a few articles in a bag and descended the stair, went into the yard and ordered the boy to harness the cob into the carriage.

Then a bailiff emerged from the kitchen.

"It ain't allowed, ma'am. Nothing may be took away!" He protested with a clumsy apology,—"it ain't me, ma'am; it's my dooty. It's the sperit merchants has had me and t'other chap put in."

Ada was constrained to start on foot for Salt-

wich. She had formed her resolution what to do. Beulah was the proper person to attend to her dead brother. Beulah was old—had experience. Beulah was the only woman to whom she could turn. She would despatch Miss Grice to Button's, and remain herself over the night at Alma Terrace, and next day go in quest of Andrew. It was all Andrew's fault. He should not have allowed his father to take up his quarters along with him. If Jabez had remained in Saltwich, this would not have happened.

The night was dark, but on nearing Saltwich she came within the circuit illumined by gas lamps. First she reached some hideous cottages, built of burnt slack—hard, black cinders—with red brick facings. Then came the town itself, of smoked and soiled red brick.

Ada stood at a fork, where one street, that to the right, led to the lower town, and passed the shop of Mr Poles, whereas that to the left led to the upper town, where stood Alma Terrace. At this fork of the ways Ada halted for consideration. She doubted whether to go to Mr Poles or to Miss Grice. She shrank from breaking the news to Beulah. Ada's nerves were in an irritable condition. She was indisposed to witness a scene, and a scene of cries and lamentation, of tears and perhaps hysteria, such as might be expected would

occur when Beulah learned that her brother had been scalded to death.

Was it possible for her to escape this? Certainly, she might go to Mr Poles and commission him to inform Miss Grice of her loss. But there was a consideration that militated against this. Poles was a chatterbox; he was sentimental, sympathetic. There would be a mingling of tears, attempts at consolation, and much time wasted, whilst Ada remained at the shop and wearied herself with looking at the patterns of wall-papers there. Also, Mr Poles might forget to inform Beulah that she—Ada—intended to remain the night at Alma Terrace.

As Ada stood irresolute, she observed a little terrier, that had lost its master, also standing at the fork, and as irresolute as herself. A gaslight was burning there, and she could see the animal distinctly. It was whining. It ran a little way down the right-hand street, then retraced its steps with a piteous note, and snuffed the air, then the ground on the left-hand turning.

Ada stepped forward. The dog saw her, looked back and snarled. She had not touched it or attempted to touch it. It barked at her, showed its teeth, then revolved and again questioned in which direction it should seek its master.

The comical little dog cocked up his ears, his tail wagged, not with pleasure, but with nervous

query, and with sharp jerks he turned his head from one direction to the other, then started, shook himself, whimpered, dropped his little black nose, set it up again and danced on his small paws.

All at once Ada heard a whistle. The terrier also heard it, and with a short, joyous bark scampered down the right-hand street. He had heard, seen, his master issue from Mr Poles' shop. The master waited for the dog, and then went into the paperhanger's shop again, taking the terrier with him.

"Very well," said Ada. "That settles matters. If there's a man with Poles, I'll go the other way. After all, it does not matter much."

How often in life's journey do we come to points where ways diverge, and we stand in indecision as to which course to pursue. There is nothing to determine our election. One road presents as much or as little attraction as the other. Yet an election must be made, and eventually we discover that the whole tenor of our after life depended on the selection—a selection made with eyes blinded to the consequences.

There was, however, a reason why Ada should have chosen the left-hand course which led to Alma Terrace, for, had she possessed good feeling, she would have known that it was her place to gently break the shock to Beulah. Had she turned to the left, in-

spired by this feeling, it would not have altered the course of events, but it would have modified our view of her character, and have awoke some pity for her.

Had she not gone to the left, but followed the right-hand road, she would have entered the paper-hanger's shop and have learned from him that Andrew had gone to Scarborough, and that it would, therefore, have been in vain for her to seek him in Delamere Forest.

The terrier, having lost his master, was the occasion of her selecting the left-hand road. Had he not stood whining and snapping there, she would not have known that Poles was engaged with a stranger, and would have sought his intervention.

Poles had not taken the message, for the reasons already given, but he had told Mrs Nottershaw, who passed, and he trusted that, in a roundabout way, the tidings would reach Jabez and Mrs Andrew Grice. Having done this, he felt himself absolved from further obligation.

Ada was thus left in complete ignorance as to the reasons which had determined Andrew's absence, and was ignorant as well whither he had gone.

Before entering No. 4 Alma Terrace, she had resolved not to tell Beulah the worst, but to say that Jabez had been badly scalded, and that the presence

of his sister was urgently needed. This would precipitate Beulah's departure.

She, accordingly, adopted this line with Miss Grice, professed that she knew no particulars, and had come off at once to urge her to proceed to her brother without a moment's delay.

"I will remain here," said Ada. "You will have to spend the night at Button's, and I will occupy your room until your return."

Then Miss Grice departed.

Ada made herself comfortable, and slept soundly.

Next morning she locked the house, put the key in her pocket and started for Delamere Forest. The Watling Street that passed the entrance to Button's led into the forest, but Delamere extended in another direction as well—it enfolded Saltwich on the north and west, and she knew that Rab's dwelling lay in the direction at right angles to the Watling Street, and was to be reached by quite a different way.

She supposed that Queenie was either with Rab, or with his sister. She recalled the invitation he had given to the girl on the night on which she, Ada, had locked the girl out.

"Where Queenie is," said Ada, "there Andrew will be."

What she would say to her husband did not trouble Ada; she would find suitable words when

they met. She had cowed and crushed her father and her father-in-law, and would find no difficulty in quelling Andrew. Jabez Grice was a man of iron, yet he had been subdued by her. Andrew was malleable and pliable; she would do with him what she chose. He had not power to resist her.

She did not know where Rab's cottage was, and she went towards Mrs Rainbow's house to inquire, but found the same terrier at the door, and the little dog barked and snarled at her again.

"No!" said Ada, "I will not inquire of his mother. Anyone else will be able to tell me where he is."

Again her ill fate pursued her. Dick Gerard had come in to see his mother-in-law and bring her a message from Martha. It was he who had been in the shop of Mr Poles the previous evening.

Had Ada gone into Mrs Rainbow's, she would have heard what she wanted to know concerning Andrew.

For the second time the little dog served to alter her determination. The master of the dog was in Mrs Rainbow's shop. She considered that, when alone with Mrs Rainbow, it would have been difficult to ask for the habitation of the ex-poacher without giving a reason for wanting to know where it was; it would be impossible for her to do so before a stranger.

Thus, a second time, Fate, with a drawn sword, stood in her way and kept her from taking that

course in which lay her sole chance of safety. By her own determination, formed on the slenderest reason, and without in the least perceiving the importance of her decision, Ada elected to do that which led to—

But we must not anticipate.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE MAGPIE.

EVERY person in Heathendom knew Rab Rainbow. Ada found no difficulty in obtaining the direction she required. It was one thing to ask in a casual manner where was his cottage, and to make that inquiry in the street; another to enter his mother's house and formally inquire there.

The inmates of Heathendom were a frank, garrulous people, fond of airing their opinions; the mention of Rab's name set tongues wagging.

Some good women rejoiced that Rab was a converted character, and that without the intervention of preachers and amid the excitement of a revival. A man said that he was gone stupid. A poacher could always make on an average his seven shillings and sixpence a day, whereas an under-keeper got but half-a-crown, which proved that Rab was stupid to the tune of five shillings *per diem*.

Ada took the road that had been indicated to her.

The way led between fields on the outskirts of the forest. Before her lay the gold-green sea of Delamere, the deciduous foliage yellowed by frost. She had no eye for Nature, no feeling for the beautiful, and she regarded nothing that lay before or around her, till a magpie rose, flew a little way ahead, and lighted.

"One for sorrow! Jabez Grice is dead. Bad for Beulah!"

Then she returned in thought to the misdeeds of Andrew.

Imagination plays tricks with men; it runs riot in the brains of women. She saw Andrew with Queenie, looking at her with enamoured eyes, telling her how unhappy his wife made him; how she affronted his father, engaging Queenie's sympathy for himself, intensifying her dislike for Ada, speaking of his wife with sneer and ridicule, finally declaring his purpose to leave her; he had married her for land and money; now that land and money were no longer hers, he would sever the connection.

"There is that magpie still!"

Ada walked fast. When the mind is in combustion the limbs move swiftly. At last she reached Rab's cottage. The walk had occupied a long time, but it had been one to brace the nerves and

exhilarate the spirits, had not her brain been in a ferment and her heart overcharged with ill humours.

After a careless knock delivered at the door, without waiting for a summons to enter, Ada stepped inside. Rab was within, at his fire, cooking a rasher of bacon. He looked up in surprise, but did not desist from his occupation.

"This is Rab Rainbow's cottage?" asked Ada.

He nodded.

"And you are Rab Rainbow?"

"This is my house, and I am he. What do you want?"

"I am Mrs Andrew Grice of Button's. You have doubtless heard of me?"

He nodded, and continued to fry his rasher, looking into the fire.

Ada waited for a word. He gave her none. Then she raised her tone to one of sharpness.

"This is not Cheshire courtesy nor Cheshire hospitality. I have walked all the way from Saltwich to see you."

"No—not me."

"I have come to ask you a question—to obtain information which you can give me." She seated herself. "You have not offered me a chair. I will take one. I am very tired. Moreover, I am hungry with my walk. Give me some food, and I will pay

you. It may be some time before I get back to Saltwich."

Rab rose somewhat surlily and put the rasher on a plate. Bread, steel fork and knife were already on the table. So were a glass and a jug of water.

"There!" said he, "eat."

Then he returned to his place by the hearth, took his knee in his hands and looked broodingly into the red embers.

"Will not you eat also?" asked Ada.

"Not with you."

He remained in the same position, without speaking. He paid no attention to the guest who had forced herself on him, till he heard her rap the pitcher with a coin to attract his notice.

"I have eaten. Here is a shilling," she said; "now, perhaps you will be more gracious and speak with me."

He looked at her with a lowering brow, and when he rose, roughly thrust back her hand, then changed his mind and said,—

"Yes; I will give you nothing; let me have the shilling. There is no hospitality where coin passes from hand to hand."

"Do you object to offer me hospitality?"

"Yes!" Then—"What do you want? You did not come here for me."

"I have come to know where Queenie Sant, the circus girl, is. I believe you can tell me."

"She is with the Gerards."

"Who are they?"

"Martha Gerard is my sister. Dick Gerard is a head ranger. She is well where she is."

"Do you often see her?"

"Yes."

"And others—has she other visitors?"

"She has not many friends, but some enemies."

"Enemies! A person must have some significance to have enemies. I would not have supposed a poor tight-rope and horseback jumper could have been of sufficient importance for anyone to think of her with love or with hate."

"You are wrong. She has those who love her—"

"*Those!*" repeated Ada with emphasis. "Oh yes! she has plenty of lovers. An easy, loose minx!"

"Take care what you say!" shouted Rab; he snatched up his stool. "I swear I'll kill you if you say a word against her."

"So—you are one of her lovers!"

Rab, looking from under his bushy brows, answered,—

"And you—one of her haters."

Ada tossed her head contemptuously.

"I'm sorry," he said, "you are the one an' only

person in this world as does, as can hate her—and you because you have a deadly, evil heart."

Ada was incensed, darkness formed in her cheeks—no red came there, shadows only. She said with a sneer,—

"You do not care that she has many lovers."

"I do not deny it," he answered—"that she may have many; she is welcome to have many to love and admire her. The sun has every flower, every bird, every insect to look up to it and love it. But she—the Queen of Love—has no thought of any save one."

"Of you?"

He drew his stool to the fire, poked the embers about with his foot and did not answer.

"Of you?" repeated Ada eagerly.

"No!" he answered; "no, not of me."

"And you endure this!" exclaimed Ada, folding her arms and standing before him, every muscle in her frozen face set hard as steel. "You—with your gun—you allow this! You men, you are weaker than we women are; you—a ranger—you, a fellow that was a poacher—you admit a rival! You suffer him to step between you and your game! I snap my fingers at you—milk-sop!"

"What! would you have me shoot him? Do you know *whom* she hangs to with heart and soul?"

He looked her steadily in the eyes, and she met his

gaze firmly at first, then a quiver came in her lids, and she lowered her eyes.

"No!" said Ada in a low tone. "No, I do not say kill him; but why do you suffer another to stand in your way? Why do you not go in and capture the object of your affection? When she is yours, then that other one you speak of will not dare to come near your house; if he should venture to prowl around, then I give you leave to shoot him, as you would a fox that sought to rob your fowl-house. Make her your own. She is worth it. She has money."

"I care not for her money."

"You care for herself—for her doll's face and wig of yellow hair?"

"You are right there. I love her for herself."

"She is not insensible to you. I know it."

"How can you know that?"

"She was in my house. She told me as much."

"That is a lie; she never said it, least of all to you."

"You are very insolent."

"I owe you no civility; you drove her out of your house."

"She left—she had too many lovers."

"Take care! You lie!" Rab clenched his hands and approached her threateningly. "You slanderous, cruel devil!"

Then the rage, the hate in Ada's heart flared up in one blinding flash before her eyes; it dissolved all her coldness, it overcame all the caution, and it revealed the full malignity of her heart.

"You—you are a man. Ruin her, cast her off—rid me of her as you see fit—only keep her out of the way of my husband, Andrew."

Rab drew a long breath that hissed between his clenched teeth.

"So! that is what you desire! You have come here to say that to me—to me. You, who hate the Queen of Love, you say that to me who reverence, who love her above the light o' day. You shall come with me and see her again—once again—her whom you bid me—"

He seized her wrist and drew her from his door.

"You need not drag me along as a prisoner. I go voluntarily. I desire to see her."

"She is at my sister's house."

"And is Andrew there also?"

"Come and see."

As they issued from the house, a magpie—perhaps the same Ada had seen before, probably another—rose and flew before them.

"Again—one magpie!" she said.

CHAPTER XV.

ROARING MEG AGAIN.

Dick Gerard sat in the window bay of his house with his crippled darling on his lap. Before her was a table on which she had arranged acorn cups, and an acorn converted into a miniature teapot by the insertion of a tiny bit of stalk as spout, and another bent in a bow to serve as handle. On a dry oak leaf were some grains of sugar, on another crumbs of bread. Opposite the infirm child crouched Queenie on her knees; she was invited to tea with Jessie, to eat some cake and sip tea out of the acorn cups. Queenie was a child as truly as Jessie. The latter was the youngest by some years, but she had been aged by pain. Queenie had but just begun to enter into the school of privation and responsibility. She was young for her years. She laughed and enjoyed trifling with these woodland toys as much as did Jessie.

"Do you like your tea sweet?" asked the crippled girl.

"Thank you—sugar, please."

"I like sugar too," said Jessie, "but must not take it because of my rheumatism."

Then both girls looked up. Rab had entered along with Ada Grice.

"Oh! my husband is not here!"

Ada looked about her. Her eyes penetrated to every corner of the room, as though expecting to find Andrew secreted somewhere.

The ranger Gerard stood up from the stool on which he had been seated, and gently placed the child in her chair.

"Are you Mrs Grice?" he asked.

Ada nodded.

"My husband, Mr Andrew Grice, has not returned to his home since yesterday morning; in fact, he has disappeared, and we are becoming alarmed. There are matters of extreme urgency demanding his presence. Whilst others are inquiring elsewhere, I came to seek him in this quarter. I thought it possible, just possible, he might—"

"Excuse me, have you not heard?"

"Heard what?"

"That he is at Scarborough."

"My husband at Scarborough!"

"Before leaving Saltwich he asked Mr Poles to

let you know that he was called precipitately away."

"But what in the world has taken him to Scarborough?"

Richard Gerard looked a little confused.

"Well, miss—I beg your pardon, ma'am, I mean—he heard that your father was there—Mr Button."

"My father not in America!"

Ada laughed. There was no merriment in the laugh; in its intonation it resembled a sneer.

"He is at Scarborough. Mr Nottershaw resolved on going there after him, and your husband at once determined on accompanying him. He laid it on Mr Poles to see you and explain the cause of his hasty departure."

"Poles has said nothing—I had no idea. But for how long will he be away?"

"That is more than he could tell. My mother-in-law got a letter from an old lodger, now at Scarborough, and in it he said he had seen Mr Button. Thereupon Mr Nottershaw started, and Mr Andrew Grice, for some reason or other, did not like not to be with him; he thought perhaps that Mr Nottershaw would be too sharp with the old gentleman, and seeing Mr Button was your father—"

"I am much obliged to you," interrupted Ada. "This is very astonishing to me; I had no conception of it. Mr Poles has been remiss in his duty. He has

occasioned me the greatest possible annoyance and alarm. I thank you. I will intrude no longer. I must hasten home to Button's immediately."

Without a word to Queenie, Ada was leaving the room, but the girl sprang from her seat, ran after her, caught her hand in the porch and detained her.

"May I say a word?"

Ada hesitated, then, with an attempt to disengage her hand, said coldly,—

"I do not think we have anything pleasant to say to each other. I am in haste. I want to get home."

"I will not keep you above a minute," said Queenie. "It is but this. I know that you have been, and that you are, in trouble. I have been told that there has been great loss of money. I am unhappy concerning it. There is my three thousand pounds—you are welcome to a part—if need be, to all of it. I place it at your service. I really do not need it."

Ada looked coldly at her.

"You are under a mistake, or else—you desire to make a cheap show of having a good heart. We are not in trouble. We have had no loss. We may for a moment have supposed that we had, but it is over. My father has plenty of money; he has gone for change of air for a few days to the seaside. That is all. We cannot think of standing indebted to—to—you. Certainly not to you."

Releasing her hand, Ada signed to Rab Rainbow, and said,—

"Be pleased to show me the shortest way back to Button's, and you shall have a shilling. Hah! there is that magpie again."

As she waited in the porch, Rab stepped before her and said,—

"Have you nothing to ask of the Queen of Love?"

"I?—most assuredly not."

"Not—forgiveness?"

"Forgiveness!"

"Forgiveness for a deadly insult offered her when she was in tears at her father's funeral. Forgiveness for turning her out, friendless and homeless, at night into the world. Forgiveness for a cowardly and cruel blow."

"Oh! she has been whining and telling tales!"

"She has not been whining or telling tales. What I know has been wrung from her 'gainst her will."

"I am in haste, let me pass," said Ada coldly.

"Oh, Rab!" exclaimed Queenie, "do not go back to all that. It is every bit forgiven and forgotten."

"Forgiven by you; not forgotten or forgiven by me," said Rainbow. "Once again, and for the last time, Mrs Grice, will you ask forgiveness for these wrongs done to a helpless orphan? I give you a last chance. Go down on your knees to her."

Instead of answering, Ada thrust past, stepped into the garden and walked through it.

Rab went after her. He said no more, and paced silently on the other side of the road, a step or two ahead of her.

After they had gone some way, this silence became irksome to Ada, and she said haughtily,—

"Why do you not go home? I don't want you."

"I am about to show you the short cut. I expect the promised shilling."

"I forgot. True. I am tired. The distance round by Saltwich is much longer. Go on. You shall earn the shilling."

Ada Grice had not the least suspicion that she was the primary cause of the devastation that had been wrought in the prospects and present happiness of the family at Button's. Yet it was her own indifference to the feelings of her father which had led him to seek comfort elsewhere, and had made him careless for her welfare. She, and she alone, was the cause of the unhappiness of Andrew, and of her own troubled heart. It was true enough that he had not loved her, and that he had loved another when he married her, but he had manfully striven to overcome the passion it was no longer lawful for him to harbour, and he had done all in his power to win his wife's affection and to become himself attached to her. So far from reproaching herself for miscon-

duct, she threw all blame on her father, on Andrew, on Jabez Grice, on Queenie, and now on Rab for not having freed her from annoyance through Queenie. The more bitter her heart was, the wider sweep did that bitterness take in its overflow.

She, walking on one side of the road, silent, and Rab on the other, also silent, had reached a gate. Here the young man halted.

"This is the turning," he said; "here leads the way down Bramble Brook."

At that moment a boy ran up.

"Mr Rainbow," said he, "here is your knife —the knife you gave me for cutting the willow slips. You went away without my seeing you to return it."

Rab took the knife, opened it, closed it again, and returned it to the lad.

"You may take it," he said; "I give it—I shall not want it again."

The boy overwhelmed him with thanks; Rab waved them away.

"Here," he said, "you may do one thing for me in return."

He took his pocket-book from his breast, opened it and drew forth the white sheet of paper that enclosed the withered rose-leaves. With a pencil he wrote something on the paper, then thrust it back into the pocket of the book and handed it to the lad.

"Take that, Fred," said he; "take it at once to the Queen of Love at Gerard's house. Give it to her — give it into her hands and hers alone."

Then he threw open the gate, and, looking gloomily at Ada, said,—

"This is your way."

"Please, Mr Rainbow, Meg is roaring," said the boy.

"Right! I hear her voice. I know what she says. Take the pocket-book and be off."

The lad, skipping with delight at having acquired a strong and serviceable knife, bounded away along the road recently traversed by Rab and Ada.

"This path leads through the fields," said the latter.

"There is right of way," answered he.

"I must rest here a moment," said Ada; "I am dead beat. I have been on my feet all day."

"You will have rest enough soon."

"Yes; if this track cuts off two miles, I shall be home shortly."

Already the dusk was closing in. The days were very short now. Moreover, a dense mass of cloud, the concentration of the haze that had hung over the land for a couple of days, lay half way up the sky, dark as

night, a frown on the face of heaven, a menace of destiny.

"So you write letters to Queenie Sant!" said Ada after a while, with mockery in her tone. "How often do you correspond?"

"I wrote but one word."

"And that?—"

"Farewell."

"Farewell!" exclaimed Ada, and started from the heap on which she had seated herself. "You are surely not going to leave her?"

"I shall see her no more."

"Coward! Fool!" she cried. "You leave the field—you are beaten out of it—and retreat without a blow before—Andrew!"

He did not answer, but strode along through the field.

"Have you not another knife—a knife you can give me; that I may go back and run it into her heart? Tired as I am, I would do that rather than leave her to Andrew, and if you go away she is so left."

Her breath came quick. Rab was walking fast; she kept up with him, running at his side. They had entered the lane. There were high bushes of holly and hazel on each side. In the track between them the soil was wet, the feet plashed in water or sank in mud.

"Do you remember?" said Rab in a low tone, "the day when the Queen of Love's father was buried? Do you recall how you struck the coffin wi' your whip—and what she said?"

"It was an accident," replied Ada.

"But—her words—have they lodged in your recollection?"

Ada shrugged her shoulders.

"It is dirty underfoot, and dark between the hedges here. No; I give no heed to such things."

"I do. She said to you,—'May you never have a coffin, never enjoy Christian burial.'"

"I had forgotten such silly words."

"I have not."

They walked on. The lane descended.

"This is very lonely," said Ada. "What is that noise? Are we near the railway?"

"That noise? Old Meg is roaring."

"Meg? What Meg?"

"Listen!"

Rab halted; so did his companion. They could hear the hissing, spluttering, bellowing of the brine-jet, which had again broken forth, after quiescence, on the hillside down the glen.

"I heard Mr Nottershaw say he had seen it, and also a subsidence somewhere in this part."

"Yes; Meg was not fed then. She is hungry again."

"Fed—with what?"

"A human life. She is clamourin' again. Water don't slake her thirst. Earth and stones don't satisfy her hunger."

"You are leading me the right way?"

Ada was becoming alarmed. The manner of her companion was strange. His words were not reassuring.

"Yes; I'm conducting you the only way that lies open for you and me."

Then she uttered an exclamation. She had lost her shoe in the clay. In the darkness she could not see it.

"That matters not," said Rab. "Here goes my hat—they will tell that we came this way."

"What do you mean?"

"The boy saw us turn down the track."

"What of that?"

"We shall never leave it."

Ada was becoming momentarily more uneasy; would have been exceedingly so had not her attention been distracted from Rab and engrossed in the search for her shoe.

"Rab!" she said, "I cannot walk home barefooted."

"I will carry you," he answered, and, stooping, snatched her up in his arms.

"Let me go—help me to find my shoe."

"Your shoe will tell the way by which we came."

He strode forward a couple of steps, carrying her, then he said,—"Ada Grice, do you think that we two are two too many?"

"What do you mean? Let me go!"

"I will not let you go. Listen to me as I carry you for'ard."

"I will not be carried further."

"Hearken to what I say, Ada Grice. There are those two, Andrew and Queenie. They loved each other—they are fitted for each other—they will never, never be happy apart. But you and I stand in the way. There is no peace, no joy for them whilst you are the obstacle—and to me no peace, no joy anyhow. She don't love me; she never will do so. And I—I could not live to see her happy wi' another."

Again he strode forwards, bearing Ada in his strong arms. She had been paralysed at first by fear; her alarm augmented with his words.

"You are mad, Rainbow. Let me down on my feet!" she screamed.

"Yes; I am mad—mad with love, mad with despair."

She struggled in his grasp, battling with hands and feet. She shrieked—in hopes that she might call someone to her assistance.

"Silence!" cried Rab. "Or—if you cry—cry to God and not to man."

Before them, in the way, lay a black blot, beyond it the hedge was in motion. The pit that had sunk when Rab had been that way with Nottershaw was enlarging its dimensions, and, as it did so, the brine roared forth at the vent lower down the valley.

Now, and now only, did Ada see whither she was being borne ; now, and now only, did a notion of her danger flash through her mind. She was in the arms of a madman, resolved on self-destruction, resolved on carrying her to death along with himself. Now, and now only, did she see the nature of the death that lay before her. In a paroxysm of terror she thrust her left hand into the hair of Rab; with her right she gripped his throat. She tossed herself from side to side, she writhed as a serpent under the foot, she shrieked in ever-sharpening shrillness, and her cries mingled with the snorting of the brine geyser. In one of her desperate struggles she almost threw Rab down; he reeled from side to side, lost his balance, slipped to his knee. She planted her foot on the ground; she drove his neck back, she tore out his hair, she bit at his hand, and for a moment disengaged herself by her frantic efforts, her terror lending strength, and she ripped herself from his arms.

Then he threw himself forward, caught her by the skirt, gathered her garments in his arms,

clutched her with the grip of a vice below her knees and rolled over.

They were at the edge of the abyss—the earth crumbled—it sank under them.

Meg ceased to roar. Meg was satisfied.

CHAPTER XVI.

BONAVENTURA.

"DEAR me! The *Bonaventura!* A screw. Can you see her, my love?"

A gentleman with a pasty face and a stoop in his shoulders was peering through a telescope at a distant vessel passing in the offing. The telescope was on a stand and belonged to a professional showman—in fact, to Seth White.

The gentleman was in a stooping posture. He had both knees bent, and had clapped his open hands on his legs above the knees as he peered through the glass. The attitude was inelegant; but it is open to question whether one that is graceful could have been assumed by a person somewhat stiff in his joints and wearing stays, when engaged on studying a distant object through a telescope.

"*Bona-ventura,*" continued the gentleman. As he

bowed his heavy gold watch-chain hung pendulous, below his breast and tinkled against his eyeglass. "*Bona* means good—I know so much Latin; and *ventura*, I think, means about-to-come; that is to say, good luck. Let us take it as a good omen that I see the *Bonaventura*, and can read the name through the glass. Do you see her, love? Next week, with good luck, we shall sail to New York."

He addressed a smart woman who stood near the showman.

"*Bona-ventura*—well met! Good luck! we have caught you, Tom!

A hand was clapped on one shoulder.

"Mr Button, well found!"

A hand was clapped on the other.

The gentleman rose upright as quickly as the stiffness of age and the constraint of a tightly-laced pair of stays would allow him, and looked blankly to one side—and encountered Mr Notter-shaw, then to the other and saw his son-in-law, Andrew.

"Now, look here, Tom!" said the contractor, "I ain't going to stand no humbug. You shell out without obliging me to have recourse to the law. I have a warrant in my pocket. There are others beside myself on the alert for you. I don't care a snap for your feelin's, but Andrew is more humane.

He comes to induce you to disgorge without making the scandal public."

"Ah, ha, ha!" exclaimed Mr Tom Button, in the tones of a peacock, and extended both his hands. "Glad to see you both! Glad to see you, Nottershaw! 'Pon my soul! And you, Andrew! I was feeling out of sorts. Beulah Grice is a charming woman, but cooks abominably — converts meat to india-rubber—and she upset my digestion. So I run off to Scarborough for a change of air, before winter is quite upon us, and Christmas with its bills and boxes. Glad to see you. Always a pleasure to meet friends, specially when it is unexpected. What brings you to Scarborough?"

"What brings us? You, to be sure!"

"Bless my soul! You don't say so. I didn't know I was a man of so much importance. What is it? Ah! there is to be a testimonial and a dinner to me at Saltwich? or do you want a subscription for a new chapel? But stay—I haven't introduced you to Mrs Button number two."

Button's eyes looked shiftily from side to side. He was searching for a means of escape. There was none. Andrew held him on one side, Nottershaw on the other.

Some time elapsed before Button could be induced to accept seriously the fact that he was caught, and that he would have to make terms with Nottershaw

to escape being committed to the custody of the law. He attempted all kinds of evasion of the subject, and would have given his captors the slip had they not kept strict guard on him. In fact, there was clearly no security with Button till Nottershaw had got hold of a certain small portmanteau in the hotel, about which Button seemed to be least solicitous, and on which alone his eyes did not rest with an expression of anxiety. Nottershaw was frank to brutality with the man; he insisted on having his keys, and he examined that particular portmanteau first of all. He had learned, by experience, what was well known to Ada—that Button's words and acts were to be read by contraries.

When nearly the whole of the spoils were in Nottershaw's hands, then, and then only, was old Button amenable to arrangement. With the lightest spirit he bade his fair companion remain at Scarborough till his return, and he put into her hands a little money for present necessities.

"Business—business," said he. "I can't give you more. You see, my dear, I can't; 'pon my word, I can't. I've fallen among thieves, who have stripped me and left me half dead."

Nottershaw was a man of decision.

When Button saw that there was no door open by which he could escape, he resigned himself cheerfully to his situation.

"I'd got tired of honeymooning," said he. "I'm most thankful to you; I shall be eternally thankful to you, John, for delivering me. That woman—she has her fascinations—she held me as a cat holds a mouse. She grows desperate tedious. A man can't dance attendance all day, even on a new wife. I am most obliged to you for coming when you did, and freeing me. 'Pon my word—*bona-ventura*—it was good luck to me. I can't help laughing. It is killing! It is positively killing! Whilst I was looking through the glass at that steamer!"

Nottershaw, having taken possession of Button's money, paid his bill at the hotel, took tickets at the station, and he and Andrew escorted the old fellow back to Saltwich.

"Upon my life!" exclaimed Button, as Saltwich was neared, "I smell the burgey. Never was a bean-field sweeter; the scent is like that of the Garden of Eden to me. How certain smells bring back old times. After all, there is no place like home. Come, sing the chorus to 'Home, Sweet Home,' with me; I'll troll out the song:—

'Mid pleasures and palaces tho' we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek through the world, is not met with elsewhere.

Andrew! Nottershaw! roar it out!

> Home, home—sweet, sweet home!
> There's no place like home!"

Turning to Andrew,—

"How did you leave the lovely Ada? You must be pining, son-in-law, for the smiles and kisses of your amiable wife."

There was malice in this speech; there was mockery in his song of "Home, Sweet Home." Andrew's sensitive spirit winced, and the crafty eyes of old Button observed the pain he had caused.

Surprises of the most thrilling nature came upon Andrew on his arrival at Saltwich—surprises not only to thrill but to stun. He arrived at Button's to find his father dead—awaiting burial, and to learn that his wife was also dead and was buried, having disappeared down the abyss opened in Bramble Brook Valley. That she and Rab Rainbow had been lost there admitted of no doubt. He had left the Gerards along with her to guide her homewards by the short cut which led down Bramble Brook Glen; they had been seen turning into the field by the gate from the high road by the boy to whom Rab had given his knife, and her shoe and Rab's hat had been found near the edge of the hole.

That Rab was aware of the chasm which had opened there and engulfed the path a few months

previously was well known. But on that same evening on which he took this path, Meg had again spouted, and the spouting of Meg was a sure token of another subsidence; indeed, the blowing off of this blast was an effect caused by the falling in of the crust of the earth over a subterraneous cavern half filled with brine. On examination of the locality, it was discovered that a second conical depression had been formed, a second crater had opened, connected with the first, so that the two together took the shape of the figure 8, and that simultaneously the upper abyss had enlarged its circumference.

The marks of feet in the marl showed that Rab and Ada had come down this lane together to the point where the land began to crack. Then ensued a confusion of footprints. Ada's shoe was embedded in the red clay. Here and there was the print of one shod foot and the track of one unshod; Rab's bootprints were seen to be depressed. It appeared as though a struggle had taken place, and yet even this was doubtful, as the impressions may have signified no more than the going over the same ground in the dark several times in search of the lost shoe. Beyond the chasm were no traces. In the hedge was no token of a scramble over it; in the meadow grass no dints of feet having sought to circumvent the pits. That Rab and Ada had both been lost in the abyss could not

be doubted. That their bodies would never be recovered was equally certain. There was no reason to suppose that the fatality was due to anything but accident. Rab was, indeed, a strange fellow, but of late he had put off his old violence, abandoned the public-house, had not been seen in liquor for months, and had conducted himself rationally and honestly. No motive for a crime could be suggested, and, when the disappearance of Rainbow and Ada Grice was inquired into, the judgment given on it was accidental death—a verdict with which public opinion was in accord.

One person alone suspected that there was more behind than appeared on the surface, and that person was Queenie. At the inquest, the boy, Fred Fellows, had not mentioned the fact of the pocket-book having been given him by Rab for the girl. He mentioned the present of the knife. But what was there in that? Most boys receive such presents. Every man who wishes to afford a boy pleasure thinks of giving him a knife. Had the question been asked of the lad, Did Rab Rainbow deliver you a commission? then the fact of the pocket-book having been sent by him would have come out. Had that fact transpired, Queenie would have been questioned, and she would have been compelled to produce the paper containing the rose-leaves, on which was scribbled in pencil,—

"Farewell.

From RAB."

Queenie did not consider herself morally obliged to produce this evidence when she was not called upon for it. Its significance she herself did not understand. It was capable of the most varied interpretation. Rab might have resolved not to visit her again. He might have meant abandonment of his claim on her hand. He might have determined on leaving that part of the country. He might have scribbled those words out of presentiment of coming evil. He might—Queenie's heart stood still with a sickening horror—have deliberately destroyed himself and Ada so as to clear the field for herself and Andrew.

She put from her resolutely this latter solution of the mystery, and snatched eagerly at one after another of the others. Gentle herself, incapable herself of strong passion for more than one moment, ever ready to forgive, always eager to spare others pain, generous in her judgments, she could not bring herself to believe in such a solution; nay, even in such a self-devotion as that implied by the last explanation. Thus the deaths of Rab and Ada remained to her a mystery into which she feared to look.

The condition of affairs at Button's was materially altered. By the urgency of Andrew, Nottershaw was persuaded to conceal the fact that Mr Tom Button had been captured and compulsorily brought back to Saltwich. Mr Button himself, with cheery

effrontery, went about calling on his friends, informing them how much better he felt in health for the sea-breezes of Scarborough, expatiating on the superior advantages of the east to the west coast, as though his departure from Saltwich had been openly planned and talked about beforehand, and as though such persons as supposed him to have bolted with money were to blame for their lack of charity in thinking evil of him. He was more sedulous in his attendance in the morning at Scatterley Church. He volunteered to take a class in a Sunday school. His constitution and spirits, he averred, had been greatly benefited by his excursion to the seaside. And a few days later arrived the person whom he proclaimed to be his new wife, with whom he trotted about in cheery mood, and to whom he insisted on introducing his friends, or rather acquaintances, for of friends he had actually none.

Nottershaw and Andrew Grice between them managed the many concerns of Mr Tom Button. They paid off his debts. They returned to Brundrith the three thousand pounds of which he had been defrauded by concealment of the fact of the mortgage. Nottershaw had had enough of the salt speculation, and he contented himself with being repaid his outlay with a handsome margin of profits. Brundrith showed himself a straightforward, kind-

hearted and forgiving man. He had made no pretensions to seriousness, was not able to pose as a converted character, had never gushed with unctuous spiritual maunderings, and had enjoyed his glass of sherry — nevertheless, he was straight, as a rule, in all his business transactions, tender in his judgments, and ready to forgive every wrong done him. He was forward to make such arrangements with Andrew as were to the advantage of the latter. He took him into partnership, and constituted him manager of the factory at Button's, partly in consideration of the value of his father's invention; partly, also, because Button's was likely to be an important addition to his business and could not be trusted to an underling; partly, also, because Brundrith estimated highly the integrity and intelligence of Andrew.

When Tom Button's debts had been paid, there still remained a sum which was fairly his own, and this was handed over to him. Button at once disappeared with his wife, and it was believed he had gone to America, mainly because he had talked much of starting a great mission for the conversion of souls at Homburg—that seat of gambling and dissipation. Therefore it was concluded, by such as knew him, that he had started in a direction exactly opposite to Homburg, and that the conversion of souls was about the last thing to which he pur-

posed applying himself. Before leaving Saltwich he had put down his name as a liberal subscriber to every description of charity, and when he departed it was discovered that not one of these subscriptions had been paid.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE YELLOW ROSE-LEAVES.

FIVE years have passed, and they have seen many changes. For five years Queenie remained in the house of the Gerards, as simple, happy and useful as she had been when first taken in. She received her allowance quarterly, and esteemed herself rich. She spent it wisely, in part in taking lessons in music, in English literature, and in the French language. She had a pony and drove him into Saltwich almost daily—to her teachers.

In the house she was like a bird, bright, cheery and full of merry music. Jessie loved her devotedly—so did the Gerards—husband and wife.

Only occasionally did a shadow steal over her bright face, and the sparkle fade from her sunny eyes. That was when she thought of poor Rab, and puzzled her head over the mystery of his death and that of Ada.

During the autumn of the fifth year, the feeble life of Jessie became more feeble, her pains increased, the stiffness that had held her lower limbs invaded her back. The face became whiter, the eyes more lustrous, the voice weaker. But cheerful, trustful, loving she remained, and to the last a little hypocrite, concealing her sufferings from the eyes of those who loved her, simulating an ease she did not really enjoy.

Finally, as the birds began to sing in spring, the flickering life went out, as her mother was kissing her, Dick was kneeling sobbing by her bedside, and her wasted hand clasped Queenie's fingers.

Meanwhile, Andrew had been working hard at the new salt factory. This had been greatly extended; what had been run up temporarily had been replaced by permanent erections. Both the old works and the new were in full swing.

Brundrith found no reason for regretting that he had taken the young fellow into partnership. Andrew, freed from the numbing influence of his father, expanded in every direction—in his opinions, in intelligence, spiritually as well as mentally. He took pains to acquire cultivation, for he saw that the partnership would be the means of his becoming eventually a rich man, and he had sufficient self-respect and ambition to resolve not to be a rich boor.

The house at Button's was pulled down when

it began to lurch, through the sinking of the foundations; then Andrew built himself one in better taste on a tongue of red sandstone that did not overlie salt rock, and was yet near the works and to the west of it, away from the drift of the smoke, and close to Delamere Forest. When the house was finished, then he invited Queenie to it, to reign there as sovereign in his household, as she had long reigned over his heart. After a brief honeymoon they returned to Saltwich, and their first expedition was to the Gerards.

"We will walk home," said Queenie. "Please, Andrew, send the carriage round by the road. We will take the short cut by the Bramble Brook."

The time was summer.

The evening sky was full of light, the birds sang, the hedgerows were ablaze with flowers, the air was balmy with the scent of white clover.

As they walked along, Queenie, whose heart was full, said,—

"Andrew, dare I say to you a word about your father?"

"I had rather you did not," he answered; "you never understood him, as did I, who saw him always, and who alone have a right to judge his character. I know, from many little indications, that you misconceive him. It is I, therefore, who am glad of this occasion of speaking to you about him. My father

was a strong man, and among so many who are weak that is something. But he was something more than strong, he was a conscientious man, and he was sincere, down to the ground. What he believed to be right and true, from that not the whole world—no power in heaven or in hell—could turn him. What he hated, that he hated simply because he believed with his entire heart that it was false and wrong. What he did for me, that, please Heaven, I shall never forget. He formed in me the sense of duty; he gave to me the mainspring of principle to direct my life. Whatever is good in me, that I owe to him; whatever is weak and bad is due to myself. But he erred, as all men are liable to err, whatever be their creed, religious or political, to whatever church they may belong, to whatever party they may be attached. His error lay in rearing all his superstructure on a false basis, and that false basis was self-confidence. On the absolute conviction of his own infallibility—on that rock he built his church; and, believe me, Queenie, it is on lowliness of mind that we must lay our foundations."

They walked on. For many minutes neither spoke. Presently Andrew and Queenie reached a spot where the lane ceased at the edge of a broad "flash" or lake covering three acres. This was the spot where the subsidence on the Bramble Brook had occurred. The aspect of the spot was completely changed. There was now no longer visible a funnel-shaped crater, but

a broad, placid mere, in which wild duck swam and sported. Around it the fields were wrinkled like the face of an old man, for the surface of the land was gradually but surely sliding down into the depths of the mere, and the sheet of water was annually extending itself.

Those passengers, who had been wont to use the old lane, had broken down the hedge on one side, and had formed a path in the field circumventing Bramble Mere.

Andrew and Queenie stood silently looking at the sheet of water that shone like burnished gold, reflecting the sunset evening sky. Presently Queenie said,—

"Andrew, I must tell you something. Here lie Rab and—Ada. Do you know that, before Rab turned out of the road to come here, he wrote on a slip of paper the word 'Farewell,' and sent it to me? The paper contained faded rose-leaves—the faded leaves of the yellow rose I pinned in his cap the first time that we met. Andrew, when I think how he valued those leaves, and how, when he first had them, he vowed he would never part with them so long as he lived—then I think—I think—oh, Andrew! something so dreadful. Martha Gerard has told me that he, poor fellow, saw us meet by the mere when he had cut the trench, and that he then knew, from my foolish way—when, do you remember? I sprang into your arms, and you very rightly repulsed me—then he realised that he could not be happy with me, for

he saw that I loved you and you only. He was just. He admitted that you were not to blame. He thought that you could not help yourself; that I could not help myself—and then he had no hope any longer for himself. Oh, Andrew! what do you think? It troubles my mind—can Rab have—have—done such a wicked thing as—as to kill himself and Ada?"

Andrew did not reply at once. He looked intently at the golden, shining water. Presently he drew a long breath, and said,—

"The death of those two is as great a mystery to me as it is to you, Queenie. There is one truth I have learned from experience, burnt into my heart and mind, and that truth is, to be very slow in forming a judgment, even of acts which men condemn as crimes. It is likely enough that they may be mercifully judged elsewhere, where motives are read in clear light. I have learnt, also, that the best Christians are not those who blow a trumpet before them and occupy the chief seats in the synagogues—but that they may be found, if sought, perhaps in a wandering circus, perhaps in squalid Heathendom, perhaps in the depths of the leafy forest. What are you doing, Queenie?"

She was scattering the withered rose-leaves over the shining pool.

"I was doing something he bid me long—long ago, she said.

"And," answered Andrew, as he took her arm in his, "and we will take to heart a certain saying on which the preacher spoke in chapel last Sunday, but which, somehow, he did not make clear, because I think he did not understand it himself as I think I do—Judge nothing—no, nothing—whatever complexion it may wear, before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then—how strangely the sentence ends, Queenie; how unlike what we should have supposed. It goes on to say—then shall every man have, not blame, but *praise* of God."

THE END

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